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**Apprehensions of Time: Michelangelo
Antonioni and Experimental Cinema,
1960-1975**

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January, 2006

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

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Abstract

This thesis considers representations of time in cinema in the work of Michelangelo Antonioni and American and European experimental filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, it considers the role of the technology of cinema itself, and its relation to photography and sound recording, in the “representability” and embodiment of time. Chapter One considers the prominence of “the cut,” and how this relates to notions of time, subjectivity and their discontinuity. Drawing on Hollis Frampton, Antonioni and Alain Resnais, I discuss how these notions are differently articulated in their work. Chapter Two focuses on the period’s intensive reflection on the stillness of the photographic at the root of cinema, and on the ways in which Antonioni, Frampton, Michael Snow, Andy Warhol and Marguerite Duras amongst others “remediate” photography within cinema. In particular, I discuss this in relation to the contemporary problem of boredom. Chapter Three considers sound and, more specifically, how the conditions of aurality were changed by the development of magnetic tape technology in the course of the 1960s. Here I discuss Antonioni development of “soundscapes” in his films, indebted to the ideas of the French *musique concrète* movement and John Cage. In addition, I look at the representation of sound recording technology within Antonioni’s films themselves, and the ways in which this also temporalizes the cinematic image. Chapter 4 concludes the thesis by discussing the thematic of “The End” that pervades the period. I consider how film itself could function as an emblem of temporal irreversibility and entropic decay. Entropy is further considered through a discussion of “the desert” in Antonioni, Robert Smithson, and Nancy Holt.

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Introduction: Apprehending Time

Time is what we know about it.
Gaston Bachelard¹

In a short piece entitled “La ruota” (“The Wheel”), Michelangelo Antonioni describes an emergency landing in which he was involved in Death Valley, whilst making *Zabriskie Point* (1970). He and his crew were shooting the scene in which the aeroplane piloted by Mark, the male protagonist, descends to within metres of the ground, nearly touching the roof of the car where Daria, whom he is yet to meet, is driving across the desert. With his cameraman, Antonioni was filming from a plane behind the first. At one point, they accidentally hit the car’s roof: though the impact was almost imperceptible, both actress and driver were injured. “I looked down,” Antonioni recalls,

and I saw a wheel rolling next to the car, and I immediately asked Jim, the pilot, how it could be that, having touched the roof of the car, it was a wheel that had come off.

– It’s not the car’s wheel – Jim replied – It’s ours. The front one.

Faced with an emergency landing in the desert, Antonioni’s reaction was, apparently, calm and serene. To facilitate the operation and make the plane lighter, he started to throw things off-board – except, he points out, the movie camera. As he did this, he contemplated the surrounding landscape:

I knew it well: I saw it every day and there was nothing different in it now. I thought that, since the landscape was the same as always, there was no reason why we, instead, should change and go from being alive to being dead. This – so very human – incredulity of mine made me smile. There were indeed all the same things as always in that landscape, except one: the tiny wheel that only a minute ago was still attached under our plane.²

In this contingency, then, the tiny wheel stands out in the vastness of the desert – a setting in whose apparent homogeneity Antonioni, after days of shooting, has suddenly learnt to see “difference.” Within an unchanged landscape, this wheel alerts Antonioni to the difference between before and after; indeed, it marks this temporal difference. For the wheel is here the only indicator that time has passed and thus, in a way, functions as a sign, or a token of time itself.

Jean Epstein expressed a similar concern with time and its manifestation when he wrote that “time in itself does not exist.” Rather, he continued:

it is from events as such that the consciousness of what has been, of what is present, and of what will be derives; no one, it must be admitted, has a sense of time in itself, considered outside of the movement of things and their stasis.³

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration* [1936], trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 49.

² All of the above from: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Quel bowling sul Tevere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), 184-85; published in English as *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber: Tales of a Director*, trans. William Arrowsmith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Here and henceforth, unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian are mine.

³ Jean Epstein, “Réalisation de détail” [1922], in *Écrits sur le cinéma 1921-1953*, ed. Pierre Leprohon, 2 vols., vol. 1: 1921-1947 (Paris: Seghers, 1974), 106 (my translation).

Time, Epstein argues, can solely be grasped through “things” and their motion, or lack of it. Our only experience and understanding of time, in short, is necessarily through a vehicle, a medium. And for Antonioni too, in the incident in the desert he reports, the wheel on the ground was indeed one such “thing” – a medium of time.

Taken together, then, both Antonioni’s story and Epstein’s remark (the latter more explicitly and the former almost allegorically) bring into relief what one might call the “mediatedness” of time and, even, its ultimate inextricability from the things and events through which it is known. In addition, since both seemingly suggest that time may have as many “media” as there are things or events – including, indeed, the small wheel in the immensity of the desert – they also point us, more specifically, to the medium of cinema. For Antonioni’s reluctance to part with his camera, as well as, more implicitly, Epstein’s emphasis on “the movement of things and their stasis,” are informed by the appeal of cinema as a medium of time. At some level, that is, they both evoke the opportunity afforded by cinema to record and contemplate events and things; an opportunity, indeed, which makes possible a kind of observation of events and things not available when one is otherwise immersed in them. In this respect, cinema’s relation to time hinges on the fact that, if time is only apprehended through things and events, then cinema is a technology which, in its turn, apprehends things and events and grants us a special purchase on them. Three main aspects of this “special purchase” and, therefore, of how cinema relates to time, can be delineated.

A first aspect is the kind of link existing between cinema and what it represents. For the most part, cinema is a technology that represents by recording, or registration. This therefore means that, unlike paintings, cinematic images have an indexical relation to the objects they represent – as well as, generally (unless, for

example, the picture is blurred) one of resemblance.⁴ Like photographs or sound recordings, cinematic images (with the arguable exception, in each case, of computer generated ones) presuppose and are the product of a direct connection with their referents. Indeed, the referent leaves an “impression” of itself on the very material of representation. André Bazin famously grounded his claim on this connection when he argued that “[p]hotography and the cinema [...] are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism.”⁵ Since these media, as he put it, “share a common being” with their objects – “after the fashion of a fingerprint” – they both present us, so to speak, with a bit of reality as such, or a physical trace of it.⁶ But where photography lacks movement, and can only give us the object “enshrouded [...] in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved [...] in amber,” cinema has the ability to reproduce objects in their movement. Unlike photography, which can only isolate discrete moments of an event, cinema can capture an event as it happens and in its very unfolding, thus offering us an “image

⁴ The classic definition of the indexical sign is Peirce’s, in Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols., vol. 2: *Elements of Logic*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), esp. chapter 3. Peirce defines “index” as a type of sign “we may think of [...] as a fragment torn away from the Object” (137) “denot[ing] what it does owing to a real connection with its object,” thus “mark[ing] the junction between two portions of experience” (160-61). Even though an index may *also* be iconic, it doesn’t denote by resemblance but by physical connection. This is the case of the photographic image, in which similarity, as Peirce points out, is just a by-product of the photographs “having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature” (159). Peirce’s semiotic, and its application to film analysis, was pioneered by Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969), chapter 3. See also: Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Part 1” [1977], in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). On the basis of Peirce’s definition, Krauss concisely summarizes “indexes” as “the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify” (198).

⁵ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” [1945], in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15. As I mention in Chapter 3, though Bazin’s argument is hinged on technologies of recording (technologies predicated on some form of “inscription” of a referent in the “real” world), his bias is obviously for visual media. Thus, he appreciates the use of sound technology in the cinema, since it restores to reality one of the “elements” of which silent cinema had “deprived” it. André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” [1950-55], in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 28. However, when he considers sound recording *per se*, he brings it into relief as a means for storing not so much the real as the “aesthetic” world of music. André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon” [1949], trans. Mark A. Cohen, in

of things” and “of their duration”: “change mummified, as it were.”⁷ Following Bazin’s argument, the time of which the moving image enables an apprehension is that of, or in, things and events; the time, that is, which may become manifest through them. And, given cinema’s indexical properties, this apprehension is, at some level, material. Thus, in documenting change, cinema paradoxically also seizes and “embalms time” *in* its passing.⁸ It can function, that is, as a sort of archive of time.

Immediately connected with this, a second aspect of the relation between cinema and time emerges. This, one might call a cognitive aspect. For Bazin, cinema “reveals” reality, it opens a window on things we may not otherwise be able to see, or to see properly – not only because of our temporal and spatial distance from the event “transfer[red] to the screen,” but also, indeed, because of lack of it.⁹ Furthermore, it can grant us a repeated view of things.¹⁰ So, by making possible the registration *and* archiving “of things” and “their duration,” and thus giving us a kind of access to them not otherwise available, cinema contributes to the “thinkability” of time. Besides, since events in the cinema are, so to speak, manipulable pieces of celluloid, the opportunity arises to organize them in new and possibly revealing ways. Cinema’s “material” apprehension of time, in other words, in turn supports our mental apprehension of it.

Ivone Margulies, ed., *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 30.

⁷ Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 14-15. The relation between indexicality, time and death in Bazin’s essay is explored by Laura Mulvey, “The Index and the Uncanny,” in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., *Time and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). For a study of Bazin’s insistence on the cinematic image as a form of preservation of the past in relation to modern historiographic discourse and historicity, see: Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), chapter 1.

⁸ Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 14.

⁹ Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” 28 and 37.

¹⁰ Bazin discusses cinematic repetition – and, in the case of the representation of death, its “obscenity,” in “Death Every Afternoon.”

Finally, a third aspect of cinema's purchase on time is that cinema *itself* can be a vehicle of it. Just as a sunrise or a withering flower or, indeed, a wheel in the desert, may be among the things through which we get a "sense of time" (to use Epstein's expression), so cinema as such may count as one of these things. This is to say that cinema may embody time directly, in its very materiality as a technology and a culture, as well as vicariously – through the objects and events it may happen to represent. What counts in this respect, then, is not so much *what* cinema represents, as *how* it does so – its physical and formal properties – and the ways in which this signifies culturally. For, of course, its technology enables the manipulation and reconfiguration of things and events captured by the camera, both during and after filming. And the very way in which cinema technology does so – framing, cutting, editing, slow and fast motion, multiple exposure, repetition, freeze frame and so on – may itself come to function as a "carrier" of time.

Indeed, there are reasons to believe that cinema has been (whether consciously or unconsciously) seen to perform this role since its incipience, as Mary Ann Doane has argued in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*.¹¹ In fact, cinema has done more than simply mediate time. For, as Doane maintains, together with the other representational technologies (photography, sound recording, television, etc.) produced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cinema has actually been crucial to the "reconceptualization" of time which is essential to modernity.¹² The scientific, technological, economical, social and cultural changes characterizing modernity, that is, both produce and depend on a rethinking of time in which

¹¹ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

cinema's role is pivotal in all of the ways I outlined above.¹³ And whilst one may be able to think of them separately, in practice they work together and are deeply bound up with each other. Indeed, even Bazin's notion that the cinematic image should be valued "not for what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it," also depends on *how* the cinematic image reveals what it does (i.e., in his view, long take, depth of focus, medium shot).¹⁴ Cultural theorists like Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer placed great emphasis on the ways in which the representational, indexical and technological aspects of cinema worked together to enable a cognitive grasp – Benjamin called it "a complex kind of training" of "the human sensorium" by technology¹⁵ – of time in modernity. For them, "the cut" in particular, as Doane points out, "was *the* incarnation of temporality in film, and it constituted the formal response to the restructuring of time in modernity."¹⁶ As a marker of discontinuity and heterogeneity, the cut could designate both the experience of time in modernity and the related transformation of its conception. For – also in the wake, of course, of Einstein's general theory of relativity – time came to be understood as relative to, and embedded in, subjects, objects, events; and therefore as very much unlike the homogeneous, continuous, absolute time of Newtonian physics. But, where the cinematic cut may function as a demonstration of time – the very emblem of "modern" time – it has also made this time. More than just embodying it, that is,

¹³ For Doane modernity is characterized by mechanization, rationalization, standardization and commodification; all of which she considers in so far as they relate to time. For other studies of cinema and modernity see the anthology: Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). For further discussions of "modernity" itself, see e.g.: David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* [1977], (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ See for example: Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema."

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" [1939], in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 171.

¹⁶ Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 184. Emphasis in original.

cinema as a whole has also actively shaped time; it has played a fundamental role not only in making manifest our notion of time but also in *forming* it. And in this respect, the way in which cinema depends on, “incorporates” and re-appropriates other representational technologies, as well as working alongside them, is also crucial.

Time and Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s

Hollis Frampton adumbrated much, if not all, of what I have outlined above when, in an interview in London in 1972, he said that “time is simply as plastic as the cinematic substance itself.”¹⁷ For Frampton, that is, the plasticity of time seemed to find an ideal medium in the plasticity of cinema. Why was Frampton, too, interested in time and cinema at this point? And why, in particular, was he interested in cinema as a medium of time? The answers to both these questions lie in Frampton’s remark itself, because it was indeed the “plasticity” of both time and cinema that, with renewed intensity, became prominent during the 1960s and 1970s.

Obviously, as I have mentioned, modernity as such is fundamentally defined by a concern with time: the question of its rationalization, management and commodification in production, labour and leisure; of its scientific and philosophical reconceptualization; of its role, as in psychoanalysis and phenomenology, in the constitution of subjectivity. Yet, this multifaceted concern with time became much more acute during the 1960s and 1970s. In Pamela Lee’s view, this preoccupation

¹⁷ Simon Field, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), 44-77. 73 cited.

acquired such intensity and pressure that, in her recent book on visual culture in the 1960s, she actually proposes “chronophobia” as a signature of the period.¹⁸ Time, that is, became a source of almost obsessive anxiety. But, as with phobias in general, that which is feared is also, perversely, sought and played out – for it fascinates and, even, enraptures.

In the wake of the postwar boom and the increased diffusion of mass-consumerism, time came to be felt, more and more pressingly, as a problem of repetition, standardization and routine. In this respect, even *as* it offers a recuperative reading of repetition, Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* (1968) indicts the incremental pace at which “our daily life appears standardised, stereotyped and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects of consumption.”¹⁹ Along these lines, in his essay “Free Time” (1969), Theodor W. Adorno noted that, whilst having “expanded enormously in our day and age,” “free time” is in effect a travesty of itself, since it is as structured, routinized and repetitive as its assumed opposite, the time of work.²⁰ For some, as for E. M. Cioran in “The Fall out of Time” (1964), this increased regimentation and standardization of everyday life actually meant a loss of time, a sense of having fallen into a “wrong eternity” from which time is “sealed off” and hopelessly “out of reach.”²¹ For others, on the contrary, the consequence of the expansion of “spare” time and of its related commodification as “leisure” time, was a sense that there was just too much of time itself. Andy Warhol once seemingly suggested that he had turned to filmmaking as a way of dealing with this excess.

¹⁸ Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), xiv.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001), 293.

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “Free Time” [1969], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1993), 163.

²¹ E. M. Cioran, “The Fall out of Time,” in *The Fall Into Time* [1964], trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 174.

“My films,” he said, “are just a way of taking up time.”²² Yet his films (such as, indeed, the notoriously long *Empire* [1964]), rather than overcoming this excess of time, quite literally, incarnate it: they take *it* up and play *it* out. And Warhol, of course, is also famous for actually cultivating boredom – a disposition which is the very emblem of time as excess and “weight,” and whose currency, visibility and representation grew exponentially during this period.

But, as there were preoccupations about time’s monotony and endlessness, so there were anxieties about its end. Indeed, for Cioran, the “burial in blind repetition” to which modern life amounted already denoted the end of time – or at least, as he put it, of a time that flew and knew “dénouement.”²³ Besides, industrialization started to generate concern not only for how it affected people’s social and psychic lives, but also for its devastating effects on the planet as a whole. Unlike earlier complaints with the sights, noises and smells of modernization, the 1960s saw the emergence of “ecological” discourse, and pollution and waste production started to be assessed in terms of the permanent and irreparable damage they caused to people and the environment. In this context, a reconstituted notion of thermodynamic entropy as corrosion and universal depletion also became popular.²⁴ But the climate of the Cold War – with its corollary of nuclear proliferation and of conflicts, coups and terrorism across the globe – fed more specific and urgent fears of “The End” as such. Events such as the protracted and disastrous Vietnam War (1957-1975), the US-Soviet stand-off of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), when the threat of nuclear war suddenly felt very tangible, and John Kennedy’s assassination (1963), contributed to

²² Quoted in Peter Gidal, *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings* [1971] (New York: Da Capo, 1991), 84.

²³ Cioran, “The Fall out of Time,” 178.

²⁴ See, for instance, the work of J.G. Ballard (e.g. *The Drowned World* [London: Victor Gollancz, 1962], *The Voices of Time* [1963] [London: Phoenix, 1992], *The Drought* [London: Cape, 1965]) and Italo Calvino (“Smog” [1958], in *The Watcher and Other Stories*, trans. William Weaver [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971], *La speculazione edilizia* [Torino: I Coralli, 1963]).

create an apocalyptic mood. Yet, the sense of apocalypse could cut the other way too, and be seen as an exhilarating moment of destruction or rupture that might, even, hold the promise of radical rejuvenation. And indeed, the period has become particularly “iconic” for its mass protests, and their international range and spread – not only the student revolts of the late 1960s and early 1970s but also, among others, the race riots and the peaceful campaigns of Martin Luther King’s Civil Rights Movement.

Space exploration, which the landing on the moon has made another symbolic aspect of the period, has a similarly ambivalent connotation with regard to time. For if “the sense of an ending” could tip over into an idea of beginning, then the buoyancy of the “conquest” of space could belie anxiety and pessimism. The idea of time was both further opened up and relativized by it. Some may have seen it as an enticing promise that our “earth-bound” condition, essentially constitutive of human time in Hannah Arendt’s view, could finally be superseded and expanded.²⁵ For others, though, it may have exposed the precariousness and insignificance of human life itself in the context of the universe as a whole. Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), for example, seems hinged on this very ambiguity: does space travel bring evolution or involution? Is it a beginning or an end – civilization coming full circle?

It is against the panorama of this multifarious concern with time, and of an understanding of time itself as multiple, malleable and elusive, that the period’s interest in cinema and its “plastic” qualities is situated. The 1960s inaugurated a period of inquiry and experimentation of unprecedented scope into all aspects of

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), esp. 2 and 17-19. Arendt does indeed start her book by referring to the Sputnik satellite launched into space in 1957, and an anecdote about a news reporter presenting it as “the first step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to earth” (1).

cinema, in which experimental filmmakers (as I shall for the most part refer to them here, in preference to “avant-garde” or “independent”²⁶), feature-film directors, artists, critics and scholars were differently involved. Indeed, the constitution of film studies as an academic discipline in its own right in the 1970s was also in part a result of this moment.²⁷

A number of technical factors were crucial to this phase of investigations and “experiments.” New equipment for both professional and amateur use was developed – at once more practical and more affordable than any other to that date. In the late 1950s, lightweight 16 mm synch-sound camera systems were launched, as well as portable 35 mm cameras, whilst the 1960s saw the commercial diffusion of Super-8 film format (whose sprocket holes, smaller than in the standard 8 mm, allowed for a larger image). Meanwhile, emerging in the late 1950s, magnetic tape audio and video technology hit the mass market in the course of the 1960s – and in portable formats (the Philips compact audio cassette was introduced in 1963, and Sony’s small video camera, the Portapak, in 1970).²⁸ Together, as well as facilitating commercial film production, these developments contributed to the diffusion of filmmaking as an independent or personal activity. So, for example, magnetic tape (though not part of the technology *of* cinema in the strict sense), being cheaper and easier to handle, edit and mix than optical soundtrack, encouraged the diffusion of

²⁶ In view, also, of the specific artists I will be considering, “experimental” seems the most appropriate term, preferable to “independent” (which creates ambiguity with non-Hollywood feature films of the time, such as John Cassavetes’s for example), “underground” and “avant-garde” – this latter, however, I may employ at times. I mean “experimental” in the best possible sense – a term which should convey an openness to the exploration of the possibilities of cinema, rather than a closure onto some (assumed) defining characteristics.

²⁷ For discussions of this development, see e.g. D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* [1988] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

²⁸ On the development of cinema technology see e.g. James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History and Theory of Film and Media* [1957], rev. edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

sound recording on set or location. Meanwhile, the very emergence of magnetic tape technology – and, in this context, of video in particular – is also one of the factors behind the investigation of cinema that characterizes the period.

Yet this process of inquiry into the cinematic need not be framed as simply a defensive and essentially “negative” reaction to the perceived threat of the new media (though of course this might also have been – and indeed has been seen as – part of the equation).²⁹ After all, the “death” of cinema had been wrongly foretold often enough to have become an unconvincing cliché – announced not only with the diffusion of television and, before that, with the advent of sound but also, famously, by the Lumière Brothers at the very birth of cinema.³⁰ Certainly, the emergence of these new technologies promoted a wide-ranging analysis of the structure, culture and history of cinema – also, perhaps, pushing cinema into “self-reflexive” mode. But at the same time it also stimulated and contributed to the transformation of cinema itself. These technologies, that is, often constituted not so much something *against* which cinema was defined, as something *in relation to*, or even *with* which cinema was reconsidered, redefined, reviewed.

These series of innovations in camera and recording devices boosted enormously the sector of independent, “art film” production, as well as contributing to an explosion in the category of the “home movie.” The setting up of support groups and associations is, partly, a consequence of this increased production, as

²⁹ For an acute discussion of this in relation to experimental filmmaking, see: Rosalind E Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

³⁰ As many others, the Lumière Brothers saw the cinematograph as just another in a line of “novelties,” of which people would soon tire. See e.g. Michael Chanan, *The Dream that Kicks: The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain* [1980], second edition (London: Routledge, 1996), for an account of the development of cinema in the context of competing forms of popular entertainment, as well as of the various patenting processes and lawsuits through which the industry itself took shape. Hollis Frampton, “The Invention Without a Future” [lecture delivered at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 17 November 1979], in *October* 109 (Summer 2004),

filmmakers tried to find ways of enabling the distribution and screening of their work. Organizations on the model of the New York Film-makers Co-operative (founded in 1962) and Anthology Film Archive (1970) emerged across Europe throughout the decade – including the London Film-makers Film Co-operative and Filmstudio in Rome, a showcase for international and Italian experimental cinema.³¹

Experimental filmmakers, in particular, took the materials and mechanics of cinema as the object of intensive self-reflexive attention – with the aim, often, of thus also “educating” those who watched their films. P. Adams Sitney sensed this tendency in the body of films he therefore labelled “structural” (by artists including Tony Conrad, Michael Snow, Paul Sharits, George Landow³², Joyce Wieland and, indeed, Hollis Frampton), which he saw as “insist[ing]” on their own “*shape*.”³³

Peter Gidal later (re)defined this trend more explicitly, by saying that in works of this kind “the process of making the film *is* the film,” “the film is a record of its own making.” From the perspective of the more vocally political cinema avant-garde in London, of which he himself was part, he also added “materialist” – where this term designates both Althusserian Marxism and the technical “matter” of film as such – to “structural.”³⁴ In fact, this concern with the apparatus of film in cinematic

64-75, assesses the words often attributed to Louis Lumière precisely in the context of the development of video and computer technology in the 1970s.

³¹ See, among others: David E. James, ed., *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Alan Leonard Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (London: BFI, 1999); Bruno di Marino, *Sguardo inconscio azione: cinema sperimentale e underground a Roma, 1965-1975* (Roma: Lithos, 1999).

³² George Landow is currently known as Owen Land. However, I have thought it more practical to refer to him using his previous name, since it is this that most often appears in the sources I cite.

³³ P. Adams Sitney, “Structural Film” [1969], in *Film Culture Reader* [1970] (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 327 (emphasis in original).

³⁴ Here and above, Peter Gidal, “Definition and Theory of the Current Avant-Garde: Materialist/Structural Film,” *Studio International* 187 (1974), 53-56. 55 cited. See also: Peter Gidal, *Materialist Film* (London: Routledge, 1989). Peter Wollen, “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film,” in *Screen* 17 (Spring 1976), 7-23, constitutes a representative discussion of concerns around the nature and significance of “modernist formalism” in independent filmmaking; here “tautological” formalism (i.e. “film as film”) is opposed to a politically materialist (“post-Brechtian”) formalism. See: Peter Wollen, “The Two Avant-Gardes,” *Studio International* 190 (November/December 1975),

practice was paralleled by a similarly analytical concern in theoretical discourse. For the main objective of what are now known as “apparatus theories” was indeed, through a coupling of Marx and Freud, the study of the ways in which the actual “machines” and processes of cinema (the movie camera, the projector, editing, printing) functioned to produce “ideological effects.”³⁵

Undoubtedly, and whether the ultimate motivation was overtly “political” or not, the film movement Sitney and Gidal helped defined was primarily (though not exclusively) focused on staging and promoting reflection on the constitutive elements and principles of the cinematic. So, Wieland’s and Frampton’s *A and B in Ontario* (1967/84) hinges on the filming of filming, as Wieland and Frampton film – or indeed, “shoot” – each other in a playful “duel” of movie cameras. Landow’s *Film in Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, etc.* (1965/66), re-presents the filmstrip, whereas Snow’s *Wavelength* (1967) and *Back and Forth* (1969) concentrate our attention to the work of the camera: the former through a forward zoom, the latter with a persistent left-right, right-left pan. Similarly, Conrad’s *The Flicker* (1965) and Sharits’ *Ray Gun Virus* (1966) raise awareness of the intermittence of projection and the mechanism of the shutter.

In addition to its concerns with the material basis of cinema, this investigation also extended to its origin.³⁶ Films such as Ken Jacobs’s *Tom Tom the*

171-75, for a contemporary discussion of the perceived differences between American and European experimental filmmaking. In Wollen’s view, in Europe there are two avant-gardes: one is that of experimental filmmakers, the other is that of “directors” such as Jean-Luc Godard – this latter, because of Hollywood’s hegemony over feature film production, is not found in the US. Finally, see (again) Peter Wollen, “The Avant-Gardes: Europe and America,” *Framework* 14 (Spring 1981), 9-10, for a problematization of the then predominant reading of the American avant-garde as a “film as film” approach. He suggests that a more subversive “Duchampian” force may be at work.

³⁵ See e.g. Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” [1970], trans. Alan Williams, in Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative/ Apparatus/Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), as well as the anthology as a whole; and: Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

³⁶ On this see e.g.: Bart Testa, *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1992).

Piper's Son (1969), which “recycles” a short 1905 film and “transforms” it through a variety of techniques (slow motion, freeze frame, etc.), and Malcolm Le Grice's *After Lumière* (1974), a remake of Lumière's *L'Arroseur arrosé* (1895), wear their interest in cinema's early history on their sleeve. The pre-history of cinema, too – the analytic photography of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey, the series of optical toys produced throughout the nineteenth century, such as the praxinoscope and the zoetrope, magic lantern shows, and so on³⁷ – became an object of attention as well as inspiration. A fascinating example in this respect is the amazing array of toys and pre-cinematic devices collected since the late 1960s by the Austrian experimental filmmaker Werner Nekes, part of which was recently exhibited at the Hayward Gallery.³⁸ Both the circular movement and the kind of imagery (animals, acrobats, etc.) characteristic of these devices is evoked, amongst others, by Le Grice's film *Berlin Horse* (1970), with its relentlessly repeated footage of a horse going round in a circle. In his essays, Frampton was very vocal in advocating what he called a “meta-history of cinema” – a history, in fact, that would trace the genealogy of cinema not only in the visual culture pre-dating its official birth, but also in other types of cultural events.³⁹

But the self-reflexive exploration of cinema and the interest in its history and prehistory were not exclusively an “avant-garde” affair. For, in many ways, it is also manifested in narrative films, at both the “commercial” and the “art” end of the spectrum. So, where Landow's *Film in Which There Appear* displays the filmstrip

³⁷ For a study of nineteenth-century pre-cinematic devices and photographic motion studies, see e.g. Jonathan Crary, *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

³⁸ The exhibition, entitled *Eyes, Lies and Illusions*, was at the Hayward Gallery, in London, from 7 October 2004 to 3 January 2005. See the exhibition catalogue: Laurent Mannoni, ed., *Eyes, Lies and Illusions: The Art of Deception* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004).

³⁹ See in particular: Hollis Frampton, “For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace and Hypotheses,” *Artforum* 10 (September 1971), 32-35.

for its whole duration, Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) makes its display a Brechtian "distantiation effect" that interrupts and disrupts the flow of narrative. Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), whose story is *about* cinema, its technology and its processes, ends with a sequence that returns us to, as it were, cinema's "origin" in still photography. For, here, the scene is that of Muybridge's motion studies: the protagonist (whose obsessive pursuit throughout has been the filming of the very moment of death) captures his suicide on a series of still cameras set off by trip wires, as he runs towards his death (a knife mounted on his movie camera).⁴⁰ Still photography as the historical root of the moving image is also evoked in the stereoscopic devices unearthed under a tree by Sissy Spacek's character in Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973), and in the sepia-tinted freeze frames, reminiscent of nineteenth-century photographs, of George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). And while they allude to cinema's genealogy in photography through an emphasis on obsolete instances of the medium, these films also bring into view the *stillness* of the photographic which is at the physical basis of cinema itself. Photographic stillness, as well as an analysis – if not even, indeed, a "dissection" – of the photographic that has provoked debates ever since the film's release, is also, of course, central to Antonioni's *Blow-up* (1966). Meanwhile, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) may be seen to unpack and reflect upon recorded sound in ways comparable to those adopted in *Blow-up* for the photograph.

The radical challenges to the confines of both the art object and the space of the gallery occurring during the 1960s are also fundamentally related to the period's close investigation of, and experimentation with, the cinema. As Chrissie Iles has

⁴⁰ Cf.: Laura Mulvey, "Death 24 Times a Second: The Tension Between Stillness and Movement in the Cinema," *Coil* 9/10 (2000), unpaginated. Muybridge's experiments, as is well known, analyzed motion by photographing moving bodies with a battery of cameras, each set off by the very movements of the subjects being studied.

noted, the “projected image” played a pivotal role “in creating a new language of representation” for art – one very much alive today.⁴¹ Whilst several filmmakers, though coming to cinema via other routes (e.g. painting for Snow, Sharits and Le Grice, photography for Frampton), are now mainly identified with their cinematic output, many visual artists also took up the camera – as *one* of their media – during these years. Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, Mel Bochner, Vito Acconci, Robert Smithson and many others all made films. As what constituted the “object” of art was being drastically rethought and reconfigured, artists such as Nauman and Acconci might use the movie camera (and indeed the video camera, as it became available) to record an activity that – as a film – will itself become the artwork. Film and video were likewise used to document performances or, as in the case of land art, work in remote locations. Meanwhile, to accommodate this new type of work, the space of the gallery changed – often taking the form of that “hybrid of white cube and black box” so ubiquitous today.⁴² And indeed, filmmakers themselves (including Sharits, Snow, Anthony McCall, Malcolm Le Grice, William Raban, Gill Eatherly, Marina Pirelli) also made work specifically for the gallery. Sharits, for example, created a number of multi-screen projections, which he called “locational” films. In this context, then, the projector – in many cases more than one, as in *Shutter Interface* (1975) – and the movement of film through it were literally exhibited, made a central part, when not the very subject, of the work.⁴³

My specific interest, in this thesis, is with the ways in which the period’s concern about time and its inquiry into the cinematic intertwine. For many

⁴¹ Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), 33.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ On *Shutter Interface*, see Paul Sharits, “Locational Film Pieces,” *Film Culture* 65/66 (1978), 122. On Sharits’s films and installations see also: Annette Michelson, “Paul Sharits and the Critique of Illusionism: An Introduction,” in AA.VV., *Projected Images*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1974.

experimental filmmakers, cinema was a way of experimenting with time itself. For, as Frampton's claim about a shared plasticity of the two highlights, *in* and *with* the cinema, time became concrete and manipulable. In many respects, cinema made time, quite literally, a type of matter – namely, celluloid: as Frampton added to his comments on “plasticity,” time can be “measured by counting the number of frames.”⁴⁴ Gidal expressed a similar interest in the way in which cinema “captured” time in film frames, and thus opened it to manipulation. Talking about the fact that many of Warhol's films, though shot at twenty-four frames per second, were meant to be projected at the lower speed of sixteen or eighteen, he enthused that “one click of the switch” allowed “the sense of time” to be changed.⁴⁵

Of course, here the “sense” of time also calls into play the spectator's experience of watching the films. It refers to how the unfolding of the film's time may, in turn, produce an awareness of the viewer's own time, bring forth, so to speak, his or her sense of time as embodied, lived duration. The philosophical discourse of phenomenology was an important theoretical framework for many filmmakers, artists, and critics at this time. With its emphasis on an equation between temporality and consciousness (of time, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it, as that which “arises from *my* relation to things”⁴⁶), phenomenology helped rethink the aesthetic encounter in terms of a bodily experience unfolding in time. So, when Snow said that he saw his *Wavelength* as a “time monument,” the meaning of this

⁴⁴ Field, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 73. Cf. Lee, *Chronophobia*. Lee discusses the intertwining of art and technology in the 1960s, and the ways time is manifested through this relation. For instance, she discusses kinetic sculpture as a “mattering” of time (128).

⁴⁵ Gidal, *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings*, 80.

⁴⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* [1945], trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 478 (emphasis in original). In fact, Merleau-Ponty also wrote about the relation between film and phenomenology. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology” [1945], in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

expression is twofold.⁴⁷ At one level, it designates the time assembled and, indeed, constructed by the camera, of which the film is the repository (the zoom “moves” forward not in “real time” but with cuts; film stocks vary, some footage is possibly re-exposed, day changes to night, etc.). At another, a second “monument” of time emerges in the very experience of watching. For the film itself – for its whole duration of about forty-five minutes – is accompanied by an electronic sine wave sound of growing intensity. As the film unfolds, this loud unpleasant noise makes for some very uncomfortable viewing, one in which the “sense of time” is heightened – if not even, more strongly, created – precisely by how time may be felt *not* to pass soon enough in an unpleasant situation.

As these examples indicate, experimental filmmakers talked often, keenly and explicitly about cinema and time, as well as producing work which drew on, and emphasized the perceived affinity between the two. And where Frampton had an unusually strong sense of its “total historical function [...] not as an art medium, but as this great kind of time capsule,” most saw it as something that turned time into an object of experiment, play and display.⁴⁸ Overall, cinema seemed to offer an ideal medium through which time could be captured, produced and reproduced. And to the extent that cinema was seen to do so, it was also, explicitly or implicitly, a way of dealing with time *as* a problem – be this the problem of its loss or the problem of its excess, of its fleetingness or of its slowness. Indeed, perhaps the “solution” offered by cinema might even simply amount to finding something to do with time: as Nauman’s films of his “exercises” in the studio and, as we have seen, Warhol’s statements seemingly suggest.

⁴⁷ Snow quoted in Annette Michelson, “Toward Snow,” *Artforum* 9 (June 1971), 29-34. 31 cited.

⁴⁸ Peter Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton” [London, 24 May 1972], *October* 32 (Spring 1985), 93-117. 98 cited.

Many of the preoccupations with time thus far outlined, as well as the pursuit of time through cinema in the work of artists and experimental filmmakers, also inform the feature films of Antonioni. The centrality of time in Antonioni's cinema has been noted, amongst others, by Deleuze, for whom the director is exemplary of the new "cinema of time" that emerges in the postwar period.⁴⁹ Antonioni features prominently in the opening chapter of *Cinema II*, where Deleuze's notion of a "modern" cinema of "the time-image" is outlined.⁵⁰ This is a cinema in which time, no longer a representational by-product of the movement of images (as in "classical" cinema), is embodied *in* the images, a core objective of representation. Indeed, it is this very centrality – if not "visibility" – of time that makes films such as Antonioni's at once symptomatic and diagnostic of a moment of crisis and transformation in which time itself is a primary concern.

Yet, by contrast with the prominence of the word "time" in the public utterances of contemporary artists and filmmakers such as Warhol, Frampton and Snow, Antonioni is more reticent about it. Reading the extensive collection of Antonioni's own writings and interviews, one scarcely finds anything comparable to Frampton's quips about "time as the universal solvent" pitted against "time as an elastic fluid."⁵¹ However, there is a sense that time is everywhere at issue in these

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* [1985], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., chapter 1. See also, in particular, Deleuze's discussion, inspired by *Red Desert* (1964), of Antonioni's representation of modernity as a dichotomy between a "tired, worn out, neurotic body," and a "modern [...] brain-colour with all its future potentialities," 204ff. See also: *Cinema I: The Movement Image* [1983], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), esp. 119-120.

⁵¹ Gidal, "Interview with Hollis Frampton," 101. The most extensive anthology of Antonioni's writings and interviews on his films is: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere: Scritti sul cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venezia: Marsilio, 1994). English edition published under the title: *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (New York: Marsilio, 1996). A collection of Antonioni's writings as a film critic (mainly dating from the 1940s, prior to his debut in directing) has recently been published: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Sul cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venice: Marsilio, 2004). In addition to the aforementioned Antonioni, *Quel bowling sul Tevere*, similar collections of stories, sketches and ideas for unrealized films are: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Tecnicamente dolce*

pieces – if not, indeed, *the* issue. As the anecdote on “the wheel” I cited at the start of this introduction highlights, time is addressed through *things*, for it is only there – in objects, people, events – that, according to Antonioni, time can be found and understood. Thus, for instance, in another piece, “Report About Myself,” Antonioni evokes the passing of time in a similar manner. Here, two arbitrary dates – 1882 and 2006 – are used to designate “past” and “future.” But, Antonioni writes, it is only by connecting them to specific events in his experience that he comes to feel “trapped” between them as “indexes of time.”⁵² Thus, a notice for a reunion for the class of 1882 that Antonioni happens to read on a shop window triggers his memory of a conversation with Roland Barthes about a young colleague whose retirement age would be reached in 2006. It is the concreteness of these events (even if only tangentially related to him) that makes the passing of time, and Antonioni’s sense of his own passing through time, palpable.

As this example further throws into relief then, whilst perhaps less vocal about time than his contemporaries in the avant-garde, Antonioni undoubtedly shares with them not only a concern about time but, more specifically, an understanding of time as plastic and mediated. More crucially still, he shares with them an interest in the plasticity of cinema as the ideal medium for revealing the plasticity of time itself – as a medium, that is, where the very elusiveness of the latter can find some form of embodiment and thus, paradoxically, be “fixed.” For Antonioni, too, cinema plays a fundamental role in the articulation of time, not only to the extent that events are recorded, but also because its own technology *makes* time. And the type of time Antonioni constructs in his films, may ultimately not be so different from, for

(Turin: Einaudi, 1976) and *I film nel cassetto*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venice: Marsilio, 1995).

⁵² Antonioni, *Quel bowling sul Tevere*, 110. The title, “Report About Myself,” is in English in the original.

example, the “time monument” Snow created with *Wavelength*, or “the cut[s] in duration,” Frampton wove in *Zorns Lemma* (1970).⁵³ For, just as cinema is used as a means for moulding and creating time (hence, for example, his confessed dislike for “real time” because of all its “useless moments”⁵⁴), it is also exploited for its ability to reproduce time and turn it, so to speak, on to the spectator.

But this is not the only way Antonioni’s and experimental cinema relate to each other. For where experimental filmmakers found Antonioni’s work stimulating, he was, in his turn, stimulated by their work. Keenly interested in the arts in general, Antonioni not only (as is often reported) admired Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, but also liked artists such as Claes Oldenburg and Warhol and followed the developments of the “underground” cinema.⁵⁵ Thus, interrogated in 1969 about the “abstract tendency” of his films, he immediately replied by drawing on a conversation with Jonas Mekas where they had discussed how “narrative” was re-emerging in the “abstract” or “non-narrative” cinema too: even Warhol, Antonioni argued, was reintroducing “some sort of scheming,” of story.⁵⁶ Conversely, experimental filmmakers were interested in, and admired Antonioni’s films. In his “Movie Journal” columns for *The Village Voice*, Mekas always wrote enthusiastically about Antonioni’s films, even defending Antonioni’s biggest flop, *Zabriskie Point* (1970), which, despite being much despised by critics and public, he

⁵³ Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 101.

⁵⁴ Michelangelo Antonioni, “A proposito di erotismo” [1967], in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 145.

⁵⁵ On his interest in Pop Art, see e.g. Jean-Luc Godard, “La notte, L’eclisse, l’aurora” [interview with Antonioni, 1964], in Antonioni, *Fare un film*, 259. For a discussion of Antonioni’s relation to Pollock and Rothko see e.g. Sam Rohdie, *Antonioni*, (London: BFI, 1990), esp. 65ff, and Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), esp. 54ff.

⁵⁶ Giorgio Tinazzi, “L’esperienza americana” [1969], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 315. On Antonioni’s views of American experimental cinema see also: Alberto Moravia, “Il deserto America” [interview with Antonioni, 1968] and Michele Mancini and Alessandro Coppabianca, “Il mondo è fuori dalla finestra [interview with Antonioni, 1975], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*.

had to watch *standing* in a sold out auditorium.⁵⁷ Moreover, films such as Frampton's *nostalgia* (1971) and Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) clearly invoke Antonioni's films: where the former calls into play the enlarged photographs of *Blow-up*, the latter is informed by the imagery of *Red Desert* (1964).

Though producing films for commercial distribution, Antonioni is in fundamental respects an "experimental" director. Asked what he thought of his films, he once answered that he saw them as "experiments – both at the technical level and in terms of content."⁵⁸ His work is certainly characterized by an exploration, and testing, of the possibilities of the cinematic medium, as well as by a fairly "hands-on" approach to filmmaking as such. Antonioni has been fond of drawing attention to his close involvement in all phases of production, and to remark on the inevitable controversies and disagreements with producers this caused.⁵⁹ His passion for experimenting with the technology of cinema, "inventing" new solutions (such as the bravura tracking shot at the end of *The Passenger*), and trying the latest developments, emerges strikingly from his interviews.⁶⁰ In fact, as his keenness to work with video demonstrates, cinema is thought of "expansively," as a medium in continuous transformation.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), esp. 372 for this episode.

⁵⁸ Antonioni interviewed by Lino Micciché in the documentary by Luciano Tovoli, *Antonioni visto da Antonioni* (1978).

⁵⁹ See e.g.: Aldo Tassone, "Conversazione" [with Antonioni, 1985], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*.

⁶⁰ The making of the last sequence of *The Passenger* (1975), and its technicalities, are enthusiastically explained by Antonioni himself in a short documentary by André S. Labarthe, *La Dernière Séquence de Profession Reporter* (1974). For more general examples of Antonioni's interest in "experimenting" see amongst others: Gianluigi Rondi, "Sono stanco del cinema com'è oggi" [interview with Antonioni, 1975], in Antonioni, *Fare un film*, 152-155.

⁶¹ Antonioni made one feature-length film on video, *The Mystery of Oberwald* (1981), for RAI television. He also directed a music video for the pop singer Gianna Nannini's song *Fotoromanza* (1984). For Antonioni's famous enthusiasm for video technology, see e.g. Anna Maria Mori, "Il regista e l'elettronica: credetemi, è il nostro futuro" [interview with Antonioni, 1983], in Antonioni, *Fare un film*, 312-15.

Some Notes on “Method”

Thus, as outlined above, Antonioni and experimental cinema relate to one another in a variety of ways. It is with how one cinematic practice can illuminate the other, and viceversa, that this thesis is concerned. As I bring into focus a number of affinities between Antonioni and experimental cinema, my aim is to explore what they reveal about time, the engagement with time, and the role of cinema technology in this engagement, during the 1960s and 1970s. Obviously, while the shared interest in articulating time through cinema brings these practices together, the specific ways in which they do this may vary. For the purpose of my discussion, the aesthetic differences are as interesting and revealing as the affinities, since they help to highlight the complexity and multiplicity of the question of time in those decades. My intention is not simply to contextualize these practices within the period so as to read them as exemplary of its time and its “picture” of time. Rather, I aim to show how the works here considered at once *partake of* and *make* that “picture,” draw from and into it. For, as I also argue, given the ways in which cinema becomes incrementally diffused and embedded into the everyday, time itself comes to be crucially shaped by the cinematic. Hence, if we can speak of a “picture” of time at all, it surely is a “moving” one.

My strategy for discussing these practices’ contribution to the thinking and making of time in the 1960s and 1970s is twofold. On the one hand, looking at two kinds of cinema not usually examined in relation to each other is already a fruitful way of approaching the question – more so, indeed, when these practices themselves are overtly interested in time itself. By dislodging Antonioni’s and experimental

films from the straitjacket of the “category,” “genre” or “area-study” in which they are commonly placed (artist film versus European art cinema or national cinema, narrative versus non-narrative or abstract film, commercial versus underground, and so on), we can see more in them, or see them differently. Rather than merely an example of the categories they at once occupy and constitute, we can see them as part of a visual culture fundamentally formed through, and informed by, the joint pressure of representational technologies and the temporal itself. But to understand how filmic practices as apparently diverse are nevertheless connected by the crucial problem of temporality it is also important – indeed, necessary – to consider them in light of other cultural products pivotal to the period’s engagement and preoccupation with time and cinema.

Thus, the objects of analysis of my thesis are not only these films per se, but also the film-makers’ writings, as well as a variety of other materials that relate, in different – and, sometimes, unexpected – ways, to time and/or cinema. Among others, these “materials” include, in Chapter 1: Sigmund Freud’s “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad,’” Alain Robbe-Grillet on time and narrative and Maria Torok on fantasy; in Chapter 2: Stanley Cavell on the “liveliness” of stillness in the cinema, and Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer on both photography and boredom; in Chapter 3: John Cage’s understanding of silence *as* sound, and the role of sound technologies in this understanding; in Chapter 4: the underlying presence of nineteenth-century thermodynamic entropy in Lawrence Wiener’s “cybernetic” re-elaboration of the concept in the 1950s, and the way this relates to Robert Smithson’s interpretation of cinema and the desert as “analogous” spaces of temporal irreversibility. As this (non-exhaustive) list shows, what I consider and draw on in my thesis is certainly heterogeneous; the sheer range is itself revelatory of

the cultural “reach” and yield of the imbrication of time and cinema at issue here. The respective definitions of what constitutes an “object” and what a “theory” are deliberately blurred at the edges. In many ways, “objects” (films, mostly, but also other kinds of aural and visual works, such as music and sculpture, as mentioned above, as well as literary texts) and “theories” (a variety of psychoanalytical, philosophical, scientific and critical texts) have interdependent and interchangeable functions, exerting mutual pressure upon one another. Read and *used* with and against each other for what they might bring to bear upon the question of time, cinema and their intertwining, the “objects” may disclose or make a “theory,” while the “theory” may be treated as an “object” of analysis.

The blurring of the boundary between theory and object (or “practice”) and the interdisciplinarity at work in my project are both product and token of the historical moment with which they engage. Indebted to and “derived” from it in important respects, they are also commanded by the historical moment itself. For this was the moment when art *became* theory, idea, concept, as well as a time of great porosity between disciplines, in which categories proved to be remarkably malleable. Not only did artists, writers, filmmakers (including Antonioni himself, as his later forays into video, among other things, show) experiment with many different media, they also overtly drew on a broad spectrum of “theoretical” texts, such as, in fact, Freud’s essay on the “Mystic Writing-Pad” and Wiener’s cybernetics. And, more crucially for my specific purposes here, an interdisciplinary yet thematic approach is called for by the fact that, as we have seen, it is *of* time itself to be everywhere and nowhere, always mediated. To a certain extent, one is always, necessarily, looking for or dealing with time in things – be one of these things, even, an essay on time. Conversely, it is precisely by drawing into the discussion a variety of “materials”

that we can contemplate time's mediatedness and plurality, and see how Antonioni and experimental cinema at once speak of time in the 1960s and contribute to its thinking and imaging. In this respect, the complementary claim is that throughout the twentieth century, and since the postwar decades in particular, it is *of* cinema too to become as diffused and embedded in "things" as time. If cinema incarnates the world, then the world, in its turn, comes to incarnate cinema: the cinematic seeps *into* it.

The materials and critical sources I employ in my thesis are also chronologically heterogeneous, ranging between texts produced during the period and others produced before or after it. Psychoanalysis, philosophy and cinema have accustomed us to the fact that time is not necessarily, or not exclusively, chronological, linear and one-dimensional. The past is in some form preserved – on reel, in memory, as trauma – and brought into the future or, at least, the future of itself. Any given "now" may thus be seen as a palimpsest of different times: a present made of past while also, at some level, already inhabited by the future (in the form of possibility: the "virtuality" of what might be "actualized," as Deleuze would put it⁶²). So the work of Freud, Bergson, Bachelard, Benjamin, Kracauer, Heidegger and Bazin converged from the "past" into the "present" of the 1960s and 1970s, contributing in fundamental ways to shape – sometimes in harness, sometimes antagonistically – the understanding of temporality and representational technologies of those decades. As Laura Marcus, among others, has pointed out, Freud's recurrent description of the psyche as an "apparatus," to give one example, played a crucial role in the development of "apparatus theories."⁶³ In this respect, his "A Note Upon

⁶² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, esp. 207-221.

⁶³ Laura Marcus, "Introduction: Histories, Representations, Autobiographics in *The Interpretation of Dreams*," in Laura Marcus, ed., *Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad,’” is a “theory” that itself became the “object” of another “theory” in the 1970s. For Thierry Kuntzel and Jean-Louis Baudry, among others, the metaphors of writing at the heart of Freud’s thought that this short essay exemplifies – the psyche as a “site of inscription” – proved a useful tool to reflect on cinema as a practice and an ideology.⁶⁴ Through a slightly different lens, I draw attention to how the then apparently overlooked reflections on temporality in Freud’s text nevertheless informed and permeated the thinking of time during the period – and this precisely with the mediation of the cinematic. Similarly, John Van Dyke’s conception of the American desert, presented in his idiosyncratic 1901 memoirs of his two-year-long journey across it, percolated, more or less explicitly, into the re-discovery of that space during the 1960s and 1970s on the part of land artists such as Smithson and Nancy Holt.⁶⁵ In a compelling article, Alessandra Ponte has articulated the differences between Van Dyke’s and Smithson’s models of the desert.⁶⁶ These notwithstanding, I suggest that there are, however, a number of affinities in the ways in which they both saw the desert as a space of time which, for Smithson, was also intrinsically “cinematic.”

Meanwhile, if the work of Benjamin and Kracauer (among others) informed the period’s debates, it can still be used today as a “theoretical” tool in the analysis

⁶⁴ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” [1970], trans. Alan Williams, in Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative/ Apparatus/Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 287 cited; and Thierry Kuntzel, “A Note Upon the Filmic Apparatus,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1 (August 1976), 266-271. For further commentary on this see e.g. D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* [1988] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), esp. 96-97. Jacques Derrida famously analysed Freud’s metaphors of writing in “Freud and the Scene of Writing” [1966] first published in *Tel Quel*, and then reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* [1967], trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶⁵ John C. Van Dyke, *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances* [1901] (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ Alessandra Ponte, “The House of Light and Entropy: Inhabiting the American Desert,” *Assemblage* 30 (August 1996), 12-31.

of those debates themselves, and the “objects” they produced.⁶⁷ Of course, alongside these “historical” sources, I have also referred to more contemporary criticism and scholarship. In their analysis of time, representational technologies and the relation between the two, books such as Deleuze’s *Cinema I* and *Cinema II*, Lee’s *Chronophobia* and Doane’s *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, even if from different angles and with different focus, have enabled and stimulated reflection on the specific material of my research.

Rather than adopting in toto, say, a Deleuzian or a psychoanalytic reading, I have, indeed, used theories *as* heuristic objects to have recourse to “as and when” for specific questions or problems. Hence, they are varied; but what pulls them together is their heuristic function for the purposes of my research. All in all, the materials discussed and used in this thesis are so included because they not only reflect but, more importantly, reflect *upon* the period’s concerns with time and/or the cinematic, or converge and percolate into the thinking of these questions. In different ways, they are symptomatic or diagnostic – if not even, indeed, symptomatic *and* diagnostic on occasions – of an apprehension about time which is both specific to the period and embedded within the idea of modernity at large.

Chapter Outlines

In Chapter 1, I consider the prominence of “the cut” in the 1960s and 1970s and how this relates to notions of time, subjectivity and their discontinuity. Drawing on

⁶⁷ Kracauer, still alive, could in fact “actively” participate in it. See for example: Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

specific films and texts by Antonioni, Hollis Frampton and Alain Resnais, I discuss how these notions are differently articulated in their work.

In Chapter 2, I consider the period's intensive reflection on the stillness of the photographic at the root of cinema. The still photograph as such appears in many films of the period, among them Frampton's *nostalgia*, Snow's *Wavelength*, Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (1962) and *Blow-up*. Meanwhile, many other films seem permeated by the *idea* of photographic stillness. I argue that in this "remediation" of photography within cinema, the "instant" of the photographic is made to *endure*. In particular, I discuss this in relation to boredom, a disposition that becomes strongly thematized, and pursued, in the art and cinema of the period.

In Chapter 3, I consider sound and, more specifically, the ways in which the development of magnetic tape technology changed the conditions of aurality in the course of the 1960s. It is largely as a consequence of this, I argue, that there is what we may call an "acoustic turn" in Antonioni's cinema of the period: a development of "soundscapes" indebted to the ideas of the French *musique concrète* movement and John Cage. In addition, this chapter considers the representation of magnetic tape technology within Antonioni's films themselves, and the ways in which this also temporalizes the cinematic image.

Chapter 4 concludes the thesis by discussing the thematic of "The End" that pervades the period. I consider how film itself could function as an emblem of temporal irreversibility and entropic decay. Entropy is further considered through a discussion of "the desert" in Antonioni, Robert Smithson, and Nancy Holt.

Chapter 1: The Cut

We can no longer really attribute uniform continuity to time when we have had such a vivid premonition of the weakening and failing of being..... The decisive centres of time are its discontinuities.

Gaston Bachelard¹

... this human soul of ours, one of whose laws... is intermittence.

Marcel Proust²

When Antonioni said that, with *Red Desert* (*Il deserto rosso*, 1964), he aimed to express “the reality of our time,”³ he certainly wanted to reiterate his continuing commitment to the portrayal of the “now” in which he was immersed, a present acutely felt as modern.⁴ His films, from the early post-war documentaries onwards, are all, at some levels, chronicles of contemporary reality, at once both diagnostic

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration* [1936], trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 51 and 54.

² Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* [1913-1927], 6 vols., vol. 2: *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C.K. Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage, 2002), 192.

³ Michelangelo Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso” [1964], ed. François Maurin, in Michelangelo Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere: Scritti sul cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venezia: Marsilio, 1994), 251.

⁴ For discussions of Antonioni’s *Red Desert* and his other “Italian” films of the 1960s in the context of the country’s economic “boom” see P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), in particular chapters 7 and 9; and Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), especially chapters 6 and 7.

and symptomatic of the time *of* modernity, and of time as such *in* modernity.⁵ In addition to circumscribing a specific historical moment, the phrase used by Antonioni also indicates that the time in question is – insistently – *ours*: his focus is on the subject’s experience of time, if not, indeed, on the subject as himself or herself the seat of time. This use of the possessive pronoun “our” brings into relief how the heightened consciousness *of* time in modernity often takes the form of a reflection on consciousness *as* time, on subjectivity and temporality as thoroughly indissociable.

Only a few years earlier, Antonioni had tried to summarize this temporal reality, dwelling on his dedication to render it cinematically, to an audience of young filmmakers at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC) in Rome:

The rhythm of life is not made up of one steady beat; it is, instead, a rhythm that is sometimes fast, sometimes slow; it remains motionless for a while, then at the next moment it starts spinning around. There are times when it appears almost static, there are other times when it moves with tremendous speed, and I believe all this should go into the making of a film.⁶

Neither absolute nor abstract, time is here an experiential category, the very “rhythm of life.” The word “rhythm,” in the singular, is not used to convey the idea of a

⁵ “Even fiction films are, in a way, documentaries,” Antonioni maintains: “Let’s say that when the subject matter of the film is contemporary, the camera documents it.” Michelangelo Antonioni, “Dieci Domande” [1985], in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 203.

⁶ Michelangelo Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work” [1961], in Harry M. Geduld, ed., *Film Makers on Film Making: Statements on Their Art by Thirty Directors* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 202. This text is based on an open discussion at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, on 16 March 1961, originally published in the CSC’s monthly periodical *Bianco e Nero*.

regular beat, a predictable pattern. Instead, it evokes intermittence or interruption: it is turned on its head and made to refer to irregularity, unpredictability, lack of pattern. The model of time charted by Antonioni is discontinuous (in turn “motionless” and “spinning”) and heterogeneous (“not made up of one steady beat,” but “sometimes fast, sometimes slow”). It is this very irregularity, discontinuity and heterogeneity that cinema, in Antonioni’s view, should be able to embody.

Antonioni’s resolve could seem to be animated by an enthusiasm for the medium not dissimilar from Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s, who saw cinema as offering precisely this opportunity. With film, as Benjamin put it, the “series of shocks and collisions” structuring experience in modernity are “established as a formal principle.”⁷ With “their constant, sudden change” of images, the movies could both represent and enact modernity’s kaleidoscopic and frenzied temporality.⁸ The cinematic cut, of course, is central to this effect; and in fact we could say that Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s own enthusiasm hinges for the greatest part on its operation.⁹ For them, it is chiefly the cut that, as Mary Ann Doane has put it, is “*the* incarnation of temporality in the film,” standing as a marker of “the restructuring of time in modernity.”¹⁰ Paradoxically, it is precisely by cutting up and reassembling duration – understood as an ongoing stretch of time –, that the modern subject’s *experience* of time can be represented and embodied. The cut can convey both its

⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire” [1939], in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 171.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” [1936], in *Illuminations*, 231.

⁹ As Benjamin often looks at cinema and modernity through the lens of the nineteenth century, he may stress the former’s “shock” aspect more than Kracauer, largely rooting his analysis directly in twentieth-century mass-culture. A neat distinction, however, is simplistic, and both Benjamin and Kracauer, as I discuss in chapter 2, consider the moment *after* the shock of the new within modernity itself. For a discussion of the differences between Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s thought, see the two essays by Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: ‘The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,’” *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987), 179-224; “America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity,” in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

discontinuities (the interruptions, the jolts) and its heterogeneity, as it enables cinema “to stir up the elements of nature,” as Kracauer says, to recombine “disjointed” spatio-temporal segments.¹¹ And this, according to Benjamin, constitutes a useful “kind of training.”¹² As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the experience and cognition of time itself in the twentieth century comes to be formed, in a fundamental way, through the cinematic, if not even thought of in cinematic terms. Thus we could say that, to a certain extent, it is cinema itself that *makes* “the reality of our time” Antonioni talks of; what he wants to put “into the making of a film” is *already* somewhat cinematic.

In many respects, Antonioni seems to share Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s position on the cut, both in practice and theory. Only a few years after his talk at the CSC he claimed that he “couldn’t stand real time,” because “there are too many useless moments.”¹³ As the allusion is to a strategy of cutting, one of the implications is that it is through such a process of selection and re-assemblage of “real time” that cinema can stage “the reality of *our* time,” as a cipher of the intermittence and fragmentation lived by the subject in modernity. While noting that cutting – or indeed cutting *out* – already starts with filming, “as soon as we focus our camera on something,” “making a choice” of what, how and how long to shoot, Antonioni has often reiterated his passion for editing, his fascination with it as a “creative” process.¹⁴ “Unfortunately,” he confesses, “I don’t like my films when I’ve finished

¹⁰ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 184. Emphasis in original.

¹¹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography” [1927], in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* [1963], trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 62.

¹² Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 171.

¹³ Michelangelo Antonioni, “A proposito di erotismo” [1967], in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 145.

¹⁴ Michela Mancini, et. al, “Il mondo è fuori dalla finestra” [interview with Antonioni; 1975], in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 160 and 158-159. As Sean Cubitt has more recently remarked, “the first cut in film is the power of the frame to differentiate what is visible from what is not.” See: Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2004), 44. His argument, which he makes drawing on Jacques Aumont, also echoes André Bazin’s notion of the screen as a “mask which allows only a part of the

shooting them. [...] Then I start cutting: and I like this phase.”¹⁵ He has been very keen to stress his hands-on involvement with editing – “from the first cut to the last of all my films” –, noting, for example, that even for bigger productions like *Blow-up* and *The Passenger* (both produced by MGM, and released in 1966 and 1975 respectively), he did the cutting himself.¹⁶ Indeed, Antonioni’s fascination and involvement with cutting chimes with that of many contemporary experimental filmmakers, for whose “artisanal” approach the cut had a particular allure. Hollis Frampton, for example, was beguiled by how “film builds upon the straight cut.”¹⁷

Yet, the speed of the cinematic pace evoked by Benjamin and Kracauer seems far removed from what we are likely to find in any of Antonioni’s films. Despite his avowed dislike of “useless moments,” Antonioni is also famous for his *temps morts*, moments in which, from the point of view of narrative and of the “moving” image as such, the time seems dead, or inert. His camera may arrive on the scene just slightly *too early*, a few seconds before the actors enter it, or leave it slightly *too late*, once they have left.¹⁸ Or again, he might persist in filming his characters performing banal activities, in idleness, or just being “static,” as Adorno once put it.¹⁹ Antonioni referred to this when continuing his description of the “rhythm of life” at the CSC,

action to be seen.” André Bazin, “Theatre and Cinema – Part II” [1951], in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 105. Jacques Aumont, “The Variable Eye, or the Mobilization of the Gaze,” in Dudley Andrew, ed., *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography* (Austin: University of Texas, 1997), discusses “the cutting force of the frame” (252) in the cinema, also relating cinema’s variable framing to the “mobile” subject of modernity (244).

¹⁵ Betty Jeffries Demby and Larry Sturhahn “*Professione: Reporter*,” [interview with Antonioni, 1975], in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 300.

¹⁶ Aldo Tassone, “Conversazione” [with Antonioni, 1985], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 214. See also *ibid.*

¹⁷ Hollis Frampton, “The Withering Away of the State of the Art” [1974], *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), 166.

¹⁸ As Seymour Chatman has noted, whereas pre-diegetic lingering may even be seen to fit within conventional narrative dynamics, as a way of setting the scene, post-diegetic lingering is more “provocative.” Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 125.

¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “Transparencies on Film” [1966], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1993), 156.

maintaining that it is precisely “through these pauses” that “there springs forth what today is more and more coming to be known as modern cinema.”²⁰ Self-consciously presenting himself as a modern filmmaker, and not simply one committed to representing modern reality, Antonioni is arguing for an editing strategy that, somewhat paradoxically, makes film include the “pauses,” the cuts in *our* time. What seems to be at stake is not just cutting, as an operation of interruption, but – however paradoxically – the cut itself as a *thing*. It is this that can render “the reality of our time,” which has to do with time being cut but, also, with the *reality* of the cuts *in* time themselves.

The 1960s and 1970s marked a moment when the cut comes to be seen not as a negative but a positive operation. In other words, it comes to be considered an “insertion” rather than an “elision”; even if, indeed, that which is inserted is nothing less than the operation of eliding as such – a “cutting in” of the cut as opposed to a “cutting out” of it. Like Antonioni, Alain Resnais, among others, discussed and used the cut very self-consciously as a crucial marker of “modern cinema,” even, provocatively, *within* the tracking shots he is famous for. The long tracking sequence along the corridor in *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), for example, is not only interrupted by cuts but is actually a montage of three quite different corridors – a heterogeneity which Resnais did not want to disguise.²¹ Frampton, who began his artistic career as a photographer, started to experiment with film in the early 1960s. During this period, he reflected on various articulations of the “cut-problem,” as he

²⁰ Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 202.

²¹ Jean-Louis Leutrat, *L'année dernière à Marienbad*, trans. Paul Hammond (London: BFI, 2000), 33. Leutrat reports an anecdote by Sylvie Baudrot, the film's script-supervisor: “In *Marienbad*, for example, there was a very long scene in which Delphine Seyrig and Albertazzi walk side by side down a corridor. We shot in three different corridors [...]. We'd put potted plants so that the continuity between the potted plants might disguise the passage from one section of corridor to another, but Resnais didn't want to hide the fact that three different corridors were involved.” Baudrot's statement appears in François Thomas, *L'Atelier d'Alain Resnais* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 157.

once called it.²² He thought intensively about the relation between the cut, temporality and consciousness, as well as about the interrelation between a spatial and a temporal register of the cut in cinema – between “photographic” framing (on which film too is also based) and “cinematic” editing.

In this chapter, through a focus on *Red Desert*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and Frampton’s *Zorns Lemma* (1970), I consider the visibility, the “inclusion,” of the cut in these filmmakers’ work. At one level, this is the cut as a feature of editing. Employed and brought into relief as an index of the discontinuities Benjamin and Kracauer discuss as being at the heart of the subject’s experience of temporality in modernity, it also grows to acquire, as Deleuze says, “an importance in itself.”²³ This autonomy of the cut, for Deleuze, is a fundamental trait of “modern,” as opposed to “classical” cinema: “the cut no longer forms part of one or the other image,” “included as the end of the one *or* as the beginning of the other,” but “stands on its own.”²⁴ So, at another level (largely dependent on and derived from the first), this is also a more abstract notion of the cut as a pause, a hole in the subject’s experience of time, to which cinema may offer some form of embodiment by turning it into a “thing.” As a temporal and a spatial register of the cut intertwine, so the cut expands to become, as Deleuze puts it, an “interstice,” a quite literal *topos* of modern cinema.²⁵

Moving to *Zorns Lemma* via Freud’s famous essay “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad” (1925), I first consider how these two levels are articulated in Frampton’s film. Frampton, I will argue, is interested in the cut, paradoxically, as the

²² Hollis Frampton, “Letters from Framp – 1958-1968” [to Reno Odlin], in *October* 32, *Hollis Frampton: A Special Issue*, ed. Annette Michelson (Spring 1985), 25-55. 50 cited, from a letter of 22 April 1964.

²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time Image* [1985], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 213.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

interruption that keeps things moving. Cinema, consciousness and time “function” and “flow” *because of* the cut. I then turn to discuss *Red Desert* and *Last Year at Marienbad*, whose concerns, in different ways, tend to be with the disruptive force of the cut, and with attempting to embody, to give visibility to the “temporality” of the cut in time itself. In *Red Desert*, as the flipside of the subject’s experience of time, this is vividly rendered as a space, or rather, an “other place” in the film.

Interruptions: Time, Subjectivity and Cinema

In Isaac Newton’s definition, as Ronald Schleifer reminds us, “time exists as an ‘absolute,’” it “flows equably without relation to anything external.”²⁶ Within this paradigm, in which “time is ‘objective’, self-same, simply a surrounding ‘ether’ to events,” “subjects and objects can be ‘abstracted’” from time itself.²⁷ By contrast, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, time comes to be conceived as inextricable from both the events and subjects apparently “in” it. Within this “post-Enlightenment” model time, crucially, “has” a subject, and it is as the *experience* of a subject that time itself is conceived and apprehended. But, as time has a subject, so the subject is himself or herself temporal, and “temporalized”:²⁸

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science and Culture 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37. Schleifer quotes from Isaac Newton, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* [1687], (New York: The Citadel Press, 1964), 17.

²⁷ Ibid., 6 and 3.

²⁸ Ibid., 7. Emphasis in original.

the temporal situation of the subject of the experience – situated within the contours of his or her own life and within the “events” of history more generally conceived – is a constituent element in the nature of that experience.²⁹

Time is *of* the subject, dependent on his or her experience of it, and the subject, in turn, is temporally situated and temporalized on both a personal and collective plane. And it is this mutuality and indissociability between temporality and subjectivity that, for Schleifer, constitutes one of the salient traits of twentieth-century modernity.

Off and On Like a Light: Freud, Time and Consciousness

Perhaps the place where this inextricability between the subject as the seat of time and the temporality of the subject is most vividly and succinctly postulated is Freud’s “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad.” In this brief, biologicistic essay, he reports his “suspicion” that the faculties of perception and consciousness, in their very “method of functioning” may lie “at the bottom of the origin of the concept of time.”³⁰ Innervations, or feelers, Freud explains, are rhythmically stretched out to sample the external world, and withdrawn. Consciousness in the process of perception is characterised as “flickering up and passing away,” opening and closing periodically to the reception of sensible impressions.³¹ The working of “the system *Pcpt-Cs*” (as he abbreviates perception and consciousness), is therefore described as

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad’” [1925], *The Penguin Freud Library*, 18 vols., trans. James Strachey, vol. 11: *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 434.

discontinuous, intermittent. “Like a light ceaselessly turning off and on,”³² as Jean Laplanche has put it, consciousness, in Freud’s model, is interrupted by pauses, cuts. Since this is presented as the very “origin of the concept of time,” this means that time too is, in its turn, cut. In sketching time’s dependence on a consciousness whose experience of the world is in samples, Freud is suggesting that time is cut *because* consciousness is, effectively making temporality a function of subjectivity.

Freud’s model here is rather primitive and archaic. The image of consciousness he conjures up is strongly reminiscent of a very elementary organism (with its “feelers,” “innervations,” and “protective shield”³³), like the “living vesicle” he had used in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920).³⁴ By harking back to the notions of periodicity of his very early writings, he presents the functioning of consciousness as fairly rudimentary. Though discontinuous, the perceptual and conscious processes he describes are somewhat regular, recurrent.³⁵ For these reasons, as Laplanche has rightly pointed out, what Freud seems to be describing here are immediate biological consciousness and the temporality of the living being *in general* – those which humans share with the protozoa, so to speak – and not those specifically pertaining to the human subject.³⁶ Yet, primitive as it is, this model, with its “black outs,” also contains, as if in a nutshell, the broader Freudian view of

³¹ Ibid., 433.

³² Jean Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation” [1990], in *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, ed. John Fletcher (London: ICA, 1992), 164.

³³ Freud, “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad,” 432-433.

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Beyond The Pleasure Principle” [1920], *The Freud Penguin Library*, vol. 11: *On Metapsychology*, 299.

³⁵ See, for example, Freud’s letters to Fliess on memory and hysteria, such as those dated 6 December 1896 and 3 October 1897, in Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, ed. and trans., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1985), 210-211 and 268.

³⁶ Ibid., 164-166. See also: Jean Laplanche, “Time and the Other” [1992], in *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), esp. 237-241.

human time as *radically* heterogeneous, *irregularly* discontinuous and riddled with holes because of the competing forces of memory, the unconscious and repression.³⁷

Though ostensibly based on the metaphor of what was even then a slightly old-fashioned children's toy, it has not gone unnoticed that Freud's account is also strikingly evocative of the cinematic apparatus. The intermittent dynamics he outlines conjure not a manual movement but a "mechanism," automatic and involuntary – which could be that of the recurrent interruptions of the movie camera shutter. Though Freud was sceptical about the possibility of exploring psychoanalytical concepts – and the "abstractions" of the psyche, as he called them when approached about G.W. Pabst's film *Secrets of a Soul* (1926) – through the figurative properties of film, cinema's structure and mechanics may here have been his unacknowledged comparative model.³⁸ Thierry Kuntzel, writing in 1976, drew attention to this – assuming, in fact, that Freud himself might have been unaware of it. Kuntzel noted that Freud's text suggests that "the underside of cinema," "the functioning of the machine itself" might have interested him and that, had the metaphor been applied thoroughly, it would have provided a model better suited to Freud's own illustrative purposes than that of writing and erasure.³⁹ In the 1960s and 1970s, Freud's essay was perhaps unavoidably bound to be read as cinematic, given the prominence of psychoanalysis as a tool in film studies, and the renewed attention

³⁷ Cf: Freud's crucial notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (which Strachey translates as "deferred action" and Laplanche proposes to re-translate as "afterwardsness") at work as condensation and displacement in screen memories, repression and trauma. Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" [1899] and "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" [1914], *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), vol. 3 and vol. 12 respectively. See also Laplanche's essays in *Essays on Otherness*, in particular "Note on Afterwardsness" [revised 1998].

³⁸ Freud refused to sanction G.W. Pabst's *Secrets of the Soul* (1926), objecting with Karl Abraham, who acted as a consultant for the film: "I don't believe that satisfactory plastic representation of our abstractions is at all possible". Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Abraham, 9th June 1925," in *A Psychoanalytic Dialogue: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907-1926*, ed. Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 80.

to the constitutive structures and principles of cinema itself.⁴⁰ Like Freud's insistence on characterizing the psyche as an "apparatus," the model of the "Mystic Writing-Pad" – whether explicitly or implicitly – certainly, in its turn, had a decisive influence on the development of the "apparatus theories" of the 1970s, of which Kuntzel's own essay is an instance.⁴¹

Frampton, with Freud: Cinema as Consciousness

Though he doesn't refer to it directly, Frampton might have had Freud's essay in mind when he wrote that the cinema had

discerned and enunciated for itself a task, namely, the founding of an art that is to be fully and radically isomorphic with the *kineses* and *stases* – in short, with the dynamic "structure" (if one may still dare use that word) – of consciousness itself.⁴²

³⁹ Thierry Kuntzel, "A Note Upon the Filmic Apparatus," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1 (August 1976), 266-271. 267 cited.

⁴⁰ For a comprehensive study of 1960s and 1970s apparatus theories see: D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* [1988] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴¹ See for example Baudry's notion of the camera and projector as "substitute secondary organs," and Metz's conception of the screen as "a veritable psychic substitute, a prosthesis." Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" [1970], trans. Alan Williams, in Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative/ Apparatus/Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 295; and Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen* 16 (Summer 1975), 14-76; 15 cited. Jean-Louis Comolli, in "Machines of the Visible," in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: Macmillan, 1980), likens the visible (i.e. shooting, projection, etc.) and invisible (i.e. chemical baths, editing etc.) processes of the cinema to the conscious and unconscious activities of the mind. For a discussion of Freud's objection to cinema, and yet, of how his recourse to the idea of the "apparatus" influenced theorists in the 1970s, see: Laura Marcus, "Introduction: Histories, Representations, Autobiographics in *The Interpretation of Dreams*," in Laura Marcus, ed., *Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), esp. 33-43.

⁴² Hollis Frampton, "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity," *Artforum* 13 (October 1974), 39-50. 44 cited.

Frampton is thinking here less of the simultaneous co-existence of stillness and movement in the cinema (in the antithesis between the intrinsic stillness of the individual film frames and their extrinsic motion through the projector) than of their alternation. It is the discontinuities between one frame and the other that he is referring to as “stases”: the interruptions of the shutter – both in filming, and, again, in projection – to which Freud’s essay would also seem to allude. What in “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad” can only be read between the lines is made explicit by Frampton. For him, as he plainly declared on several occasions, the very mechanics of cinema are “‘about’ consciousness” and its interrupted temporality: they both *act on* it and *enact* it.⁴³

For Frampton, in fact, a perceptual and a metaphorical “mode” co-exist. When he describes the ambition of a (certain) cinema as “the bodying forth of the movement of consciousness itself,”⁴⁴ he embraces an understanding of it as a perceptual activity which can be geared to produce, in the viewers, a self-reflexive awareness of their own consciousness “in action.” Like many other phenomenologically-informed works of the period, Frampton’s own films probe the relation between mind and cinema, by using the latter (its constitutive materials and basic principles) to attract attention to the viewer’s perceptual and mental processes.⁴⁵ According to P. Adams Sitney, the structural film – the category he coined to describe much of this body of work, and in which he includes Frampton’s films – “evoke[d] states of consciousness without mediation, that is, with the sole mediation of the camera.”⁴⁶ By dissecting the cinematic, in a vein both self-reflexive

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Frampton, “The Withering Away of the State of the Art,” 164.

⁴⁵ This is more pronounced in the early, more abstract films, such as *Process Red* (1966) and *Heterodyne* (1967).

⁴⁶ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 370. To Sitney’s own admission, Frampton’s films somewhat rendered the very

and didactic, structural filmmakers dissected the relation between cinema and mind, opened it up for scrutiny and analysis at the perceptual level, presenting work, as Peter Gidal put it, during which “one watches oneself watching.”⁴⁷ However, even *Zorns Lemma*, which Frampton himself described as “a very didactic work,”⁴⁸ does not do it as directly and as exclusively as, for example, a flicker film does. When, interviewed by Simon Field in London in 1972, Frampton was asked: “Your films are about the consciousness of the people who are looking at them, aren’t they?” his quipping answer was: “I would like to believe that they’re about consciousness, period.”⁴⁹ This terse reply encapsulates how, for him, an appreciation of cinema as an activity engaging the viewers’ consciousness, cohabits with the notion that cinema *itself* can function as a “mimesis,” an “incarnation” of consciousness.⁵⁰ Paradoxically perhaps, by *deconstructing* the mechanics of, and dynamics between, the cinema and the viewer’s psychic activity, certain works come, in many respects, to use cinema itself to *construct* an “analogue[s] of consciousness,” as Annette Michelson once put it.⁵¹ “Film, even in its physical attributes,” Frampton tells Field, “has become a kind of metaphor *for* consciousness for me.”⁵²

category problematic: see his 1970 “Postscript” to his “Structural Film” [1969], in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* [1970] (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), esp. 346–48 on Frampton.

⁴⁷ Peter Gidal, “Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film” [1978], in Peter Gidal, ed., *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI, 1978), 10.

⁴⁸ Peter Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton” [London, 24 May 1972], in Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, 64–72. Here and subsequently I refer to the reprint in *October* 32 (Spring 1985), 93–117. 108 cited.

⁴⁹ Simon Field, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), 44–77. 53 cited.

⁵⁰ Frampton, “The Withering Away of the State of the Arts,” 164.

⁵¹ Annette Michelson, “Toward Snow,” in *Artforum* 9 (June 1971), 29–34.

⁵² Simon Field, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 66 (my emphasis). Contemporary literature on experimental filmmaking certainly tended to highlight and lever on this metaphoric as opposed to other aspects. See, for example, the exhibition catalogue: Marilyn Singer, ed., *A History of American Avant-Garde Cinema* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1976). See also: Malcolm Turvey, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, et. al, “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art,” *October* 104 (Spring 2003), 71–96, in which Turvey suggests that Sitney’s and Michelson’s reading of 1960s and 1970s avant-garde cinema “in terms of the use of film as a metaphor for the mind” could, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to many artists working with the moving image at present, such as Douglas Gordon (84).

In fact, Frampton explains this by pitting film, and its “activation” as cinema, against video. It is the fundamental discontinuity, the infinitesimal, and recurrent, moment of pause, of stasis, at the heart of the cinematic that makes film, in his view, win over video as a model of the mind. The central property of film in this respect is precisely the “incremental frame,” “which video does not have, it’s frameless, it’s continuous.”⁵³ As a cipher of the “the quantum, the chunk nature, of light itself,” the “incremental frame” is therefore at the core of the metaphor.⁵⁴ Whether thought of as light or as cinema, or, aptly, as a play of the one in the other, consciousness, for Frampton, is always inherently interrupted, and hence fragmentary, partial. Further elaborating on the superiority of cinema as a model, in fact, he goes on to explain:

If you’re watching a film, you believe you’re watching a complete illusion of something real, but you’re actually watching an illusion of only half what took place. The camera’s shutter was closed the other half of the time. So that there is another cinema of equal length that could have been made precisely at the same time. And when you play that back, the shutter in the projector is also closed half the time, so that half the time you’re sitting in total darkness.⁵⁵

These fractional black-outs, in a way, constitute a first, basic form of the “cut” in the cinema; a cut that the editing cut then reinstates at a different level. Playing on this, it is precisely through the editing cut that, in the central part of *Zorns Lemma*, Frampton stages or, better, fictionalizes these intermittent dynamics he so

⁵³ Field, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 66.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

enthusiastically sees as the cinematic “incarnation” of the interrupted temporality of consciousness. The fast and systemic montage Frampton concocted for this does indeed function as a sort of dramatization of the mechanic “cuts” of the shutter’s interruptions, consisting, as it does, of a sustained rhythm of short shots visibly interrupted – and at the same time *motored* – by editing cuts.

This silent middle part starts with a run through the letters of the Roman alphabet, as each letter, set against a dark background, is held for one second before the cut to the next.⁵⁶ The sustained, regular cutting pace remains throughout the rest of the section, which, for over forty minutes, runs through alphabet cycles “told” through imagery. Initially, the images consist of one-second shots of “words” – different at every cycle, apart from a few exceptions – found in the urban environment (Manhattan), such as shop signs, graffiti, etc., so that the words’ initials denote the relevant alphabet letters (ills. 1 and 2, pp. 329-30). After a while, a second type of images is also introduced. These are constituted by shots, again of the duration of one second, of ongoing segments of human actions, natural phenomena or animals, used to replace, at the pace of one per cycle – though not at *every* new cycle, and randomly rather than alphabetically – the urban word-images (ills. 3 and 4, pp. 331-32). Given the uniform but brief “rhythm” of the shots, the overall effect is that of a sustained, heterogeneous pulsation of images recurrently interrupted by cuts, by fractional “stases.” It is, as Paul Arthur has recently described it, a “controlled riot of colour and shape and semantic meaning.”⁵⁷ Disintegrating Manhattan into “an impossible

⁵⁶ For an in-depth analysis and discussion of the film as a whole, see, among others: Wanda Bershen, “Zorns Lemma,” in *Artforum* 10, *Special Film Issue* (September 1971), 41-45; Allen S. Weiss, “Frampton’s Lemma, Zorn’s Dilemma,” *October* 32 (Spring 1985), 118-128; David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film of the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 254-260; Scott Macdonald, *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 6.

⁵⁷ Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film Since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 52.

onslaught of rapid-fire signs,” which we then “gradually come to master conceptually, just like the inhabitants of actual cities learn to master their physical perambulations,” *Zorns Lemma* is very Benjaminesque.⁵⁸ It evokes and demonstrates Benjamin’s conception of cinema as at once an incarnation of, and a training for, the “series of shocks and collisions” involved in the quintessentially modern experience of moving through a big city.⁵⁹ Throughout, the cut is not elided, but “included,” made perceptible, visible; acquiring, in fact, more and more “presence” through its insistent, relentless reiteration as the alphabet cycles continue to unfold for about three-quarters of an hour.

In fact, *Zorns Lemma* includes and makes present both a temporal and a spatial register of the cut. Once described by Frampton as the outcome of his “being systematically forced into cinema by [his] work in still photography,” the film is also a meditation on the interrelation between the spatiality of the photographic cut, as framing, and the temporality of the cinematic cut, as act of interruption.⁶⁰ Indeed, perhaps it even bears witness to having been Frampton’s possible solution to “the cut-problem,” “the problem of recognizing, setting up, locking in a cut,” formulated in relation to photography in the early 1960s, the same years in which he was beginning to experiment with the filmic medium.⁶¹ While Frampton talked of *Zorns Lemma* as “a way of handling stills,” no actual photographs are in it.⁶² What is there, though, in the one-second length shots, is the *idea* of the still: the photographic cut as

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52 and 54.

⁵⁹ Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 171.

⁶⁰ Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 93. As he tells Gidal, Frampton started experimenting with a movie camera in the autumn of 1962.

⁶¹ Frampton, “Letters from Framp – 1958-1968” [to Reno Odlin], 50.

⁶² Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 93. Indeed, the embryonic idea for the film would seem to be *Word Pictures*, the black and white photographic series of environmental words Frampton produced between 1962-1963. For a discussion of Frampton’s relation to his photographic activity see: Christopher Phillips, “Word Pictures,” *October* 32 (Spring 1985), 63-76. For his often neglected photographic output, see: Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane, eds., *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/*

a segment of space (and, indeed, a spatialized “instant”⁶³) locked within the frame. This is what Roland Barthes would call “the tableau,” “a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible,” which, in *Zorns Lemma* – and in the cinema more generally – is “moving” and durational.⁶⁴ One of Frampton’s preoccupations, during this period of reflection over the “the cut-problem,” seems to have been that the photograph wouldn’t enable the inclusion of the “dimensionless,” yet “in the mind, precisely as real” operation of interruption constitutive of the tableau, of the photographic segment itself.⁶⁵ It is here that cinema apparently offered a solution, as what the still necessarily leaves off, or just *at* its edge – something to be imagined rather than seen – the moving image could incorporate and make visible. With the editing cut, cinema presented itself as the medium that could concretize this “dimensionless” temporal operation of interruption and elision. Through, in its turn, a hybridization with spatiality, film could extend and draw out this act of suspension and separation. It could give body and duration to this aspect of the cut (and, indeed, another of Frampton’s concerns was the idea of a “*duration of cutting*”⁶⁶), so as to bring it above perceptibility, embodying it, in a way, as another kind of segment. At the end of each alphabet cycle, for example, the cut itself is punctuated and enhanced

Recreations, exhibition catalogue: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), which also brings into relief the continuous intertwining between his still and moving work.

⁶³ Cf. Erwin Panofsky, “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures” [1934], in *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). Panofsky sees the “spatialisation of time,” and, even, the creation of a space “doubly charged with time” as among the unique possibilities of the cinematic medium (96 and 104).

⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein” [1973], in Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 70.

⁶⁵ Hollis Frampton, “Digressions on the Photographic Agony,” *Artforum* 11 (November 1972), 43-51. 51 cited.

⁶⁶ A friend of Carl Andre’s, Frampton developed his reflections on the cut, in both photography and cinema, also through thinking about sculpture. In one of twelve early-1960s “dialogues” between the two artists, edited in a collection by Benjamin Buchloh in the 1980s, Frampton explains: “I cut that timber in Ohio because I wanted to get some idea into my forearms of how a certain kind of sculpture was done. I wanted a sense of the *duration* of cutting.” Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, *12 Dialogues 1962-1963*, ed. Benjamin Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), 15. Emphasis in original. The dialogue is entitled “On Sculpture and Consecutive Matters,” and dated October 14, 1962.

by a second of darkness, of blank screen. A spatialized temporal dimension, the cut appears as a *visible* “interval,” as Deleuze calls it, which is also an “interstice,” “an autonomous outside.”⁶⁷

Frampton has remarked that he chose the system of the alphabet as “essentially [...] a chance operation,” so as to make the order of the images “as random as possible, that is, to avoid imposing my own taste,” meaning, and narrative on the film.⁶⁸ Effectively a readymade system, the alphabet – from Jasper Johns’ encaustic paintings to Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) – was indeed popular with artists seeking to problematize the idea of art as lyrical, personal expression. In the use of the alphabet as a structure providing at once systematization and randomness to the film, Frampton’s montage differs, crucially, from that of Sergei Eisenstein, where cutting is the basic operation for the articulation and creation of meaning *through* the concatenation of images.⁶⁹ In Frampton’s film, this meaningful concatenation is avoided in favour of a *serial* arrangement, in which no one term bears any logical relation to those on either side of it. In this respect, the alphabet is crucial, since this is itself precisely a series in which each term is conventionally and paratactically, rather than logically and hierarchically, arranged. For Deleuze, Eisenstein is exemplary of the “classical” cinematic model, in which the cut is subordinated to “the linkage of images.” This subordination, however, is abolished in “modern” cinema, where, as we have seen, according to Deleuze the cut gains “importance in itself,” not as *part of* the images, but *on a par* with them.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 277-278.

⁶⁸ Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 94 and 96. Melissa Ragona discusses Frampton’s use of the alphabet and conceptual mathematics (Zorn’s Lemma is a term from set theory) in “Hidden Noise: Strategies of Sound Montage in the Films of Hollis Frampton,” *October* 109 (Summer 2004), 96-118; esp. 104-109.

⁶⁹ See: Sergei Eisenstein, “Word and Image,” in *The Film Sense* [1943], trans. Jay Leida (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

⁷⁰ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 213.

And it is parity between cuts and images that *Zorns Lemma*'s serialization obtains. This is not only when the cut is expanded to "last" one second at the end of each cycle but, also, within the individual cycles, where, rather than as a link, it functions as a separation between independent images.

Despite Frampton's emphasis on chance, however, it is not incidental that Frampton has forced the normal twenty-six letter alphabet of the English language down to twenty-four, by counting I and J, and U and V as one letter. This, in fact, renders the pulsation, the intermittence of images and cuts, more obviously "about" cinema's mechanics. Since the individual shots are uniformly one second long, each alphabet cycle takes twenty-four seconds to complete. Thus, the overall duration of a cycle echoes the number of frames (twenty-four for a second of film projected at standard sound speed) of which each of its shots is composed. In Noël Carroll's view, this structure makes *Zorns Lemma* "the archetypal systemic film."⁷¹ And, perhaps, it is even more so in view of the irregularities, a missing frame or a frame in excess, that Frampton deliberately inserted here and there as the inevitable "glitch" to any system.⁷² The twenty-four second cycles, with their cut at each second, are, in a way, a sort of twenty-four-times enlargement of one second of film. It is as if the number of film frames passing through the apparatus in any one second had been put under a time-magnifying lens, so as to allow the viewer to see each one, and the separations between one and the other, individually. The recurrent, regular editing cut between shots can be seen to function as a cipher of the fundamentally interrupted mechanics of both camera and projector; its time scale enlarged, expanded, so as to bring it above the threshold of visibility. It is as if the editing cut – a sort of "second order" of the cut in the cinema – were used to enact, to

⁷¹ Noël Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 306.

fictionalize, cinema's basic intermittence – the “first order” of the cut constituted by the shutter's interruptions. By having one incarnate the other, *both* acquire a certain relief in time and space, a certain *corpus*.

But the syncopation embodied by *Zorns Lemma*'s fast montage is also, as we have seen, the pivot around which, for Frampton, the cinema-consciousness metaphor revolves. If cinema and the mind are “alike,” it is not simply because they are both “moving,” but because their movement is essentially discontinuous, and their temporality broken up. With its sustained intermittence, its visual bombardment punctuated by breaks, *Zorns Lemma* not only acts on (the viewer's) consciousness, but also enacts consciousness itself; incarnates it, as Frampton would put it, offers itself as a model. By both addressing and demonstrating the very logic of discontinuous temporality upon which, in Frampton's view, the metaphor operates, the film can therefore also be seen to crystallize his reflections on the relation between cinema and the mind. In this respect, as Melissa Ragona has recently noted, the film's “systematic interruption is not necessarily about disruption”: instead it “sharpens the focus” on – and *demonstrates* – perception and consciousness as “nonlinear process[es].”⁷³ Paradoxically, what interrupts cinema and consciousness, is also, for Frampton, what motors them, what enables and sustains their very mobility.

Though he seemingly presents their isomorphism as self-evident, even innate, *Zorns Lemma*'s very constructedness brings into relief how cinema offers Frampton not so much a medium through which to describe the psyche, as a structure through which to construct it. As in Freud's “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad” (and, of course, his thought at large), or in Kuntzel's text, the description of a model *of* the

⁷² Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 97.

mind is also always the constitution of a model *for* it. In this imaging, whether implicitly or explicitly, cinema is certainly a persistent instrument. Sometimes, as in Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896), such a use may even almost pre-date, or narrowly coincide with cinema's own actual birth.⁷⁴ As we have seen, during the 1960s and 1970s, bolstered by the increased popularity of phenomenology, psychoanalysis and structuralism, the notion of an analogy between cinema and the psyche became increasingly embedded and widespread (with "apparatus theories" indeed representing an apex). So, for example, in the early 1960s Alain Resnais explained his *Last Year at Marienbad*, with a language not entirely at odds with the one later to be used by Frampton, as "an attempt, still crude and primitive, to approach the complexity of thought and of its mechanisms."⁷⁵ A similar vocabulary is found applied to Antonioni's films too. Writing in 1961, the critic Guido Aristarco characterized them as "a precise analysis of the psychic machinery itself."⁷⁶ It is to Antonioni's and Resnais's cinematic models *of* and *for* the psyche and its temporality that I now turn.

⁷³ Ragona, "Hidden Noise," 108.

⁷⁴ Though Bergson does not explicitly mention the cinema in *Matter and Memory*, his account there is strikingly cinematic (and it is on this account that Deleuze levers his re-appropriation of the philosopher's thought for his own *Cinema* books), and he does indeed explain the mechanism of thought as cinematographic in his later *Creative Evolution*. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* [1986], trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991) and *Creative Evolution* [1907], trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), chapter IV. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement Image* [1983], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), esp. chapter 1. Another early classical account of cinema as an exteriorization of the operations of the mind is Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1916). Deleuze is himself using – and proposing – the cinema as a model for thought and the mind. In addition to the *Cinema* books, see: Gilles Deleuze, "The Brain Is the Screen" [1986] trans. Marie Therese Guirgis, in Gregory Flaxman, ed., *The Brain Is the Screen* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 365-373.

⁷⁵ Alain Resnais, "Trying to Understand My Own Film" [1962], in Geduld, *Film Makers on Film Making*, 160.

⁷⁶ Guido Aristarco, "Literary Cinema" [1961], in Pierre Leprohon, *Michelangelo Antonioni: An Introduction* [1961], trans. Scott Sullivan (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 162.

Out of Gear: Red Desert and Last Year at Marienbad

Interviewed by Jean-Luc Godard following the release of *Red Desert*, Antonioni at one point excitedly tells him of his recent meetings with two cybernetics experts, who had been developing artificial brains. One of them had constructed a “true electronic brain,” he explains, while the other had “invented a chemical brain.” This latter had visited the director in Rome while *en route* to a conference in Naples where he was going to show his invention, “one of the most extraordinary discoveries in the world.”⁷⁷ Antonioni goes on to describe the scientist’s invention:

It was a tiny box, mounted on some tubes: they are cells, whose composition contains gold together with other substances, immersed in a chemical liquid. They live an autonomous life and have reactions: if you enter the room they’ll assume a certain shape, while they’ll assume a different shape if I enter, and so on. In that tiny box there are only a few million cells, but starting from those it is possible to recreate the human brain.⁷⁸

Antonioni is fascinated by this invention, by the possibility of “recreating” the human brain in a box, and seeing it function in the open, with the processes of perceiving and reacting all on the outside, visible and measurable. His excitement, in many respects, speaks of a certain affinity he perceives between the operations of

cinema and the scientists' artificial brains. In agreement with what Aristarco had suggested, in this period, Antonioni, like Frampton, seems to treat cinema as a means "to recreate the human brain" on a screen, to enact the psyche's very structures and dynamics.

"The States of Mind Themselves"

But whereas Frampton's concerns are, overall, more abstract and absolute ("about consciousness, period"),⁷⁹ Antonioni is especially interested in situating this psyche historically, amidst the radical processes of social, economic and cultural transformation of the post-war period. It is also for this reason that, where Frampton's focus lies mostly in addressing and (re)producing how consciousness *functions*, Antonioni's also comes to be on how consciousness may *malfunction* in response to these dramatic changes. Indeed, the chief aim is to analyse the effects of "history" on the psyche, to see "what remained inside the individual," as Antonioni put it at his talk at the Centro Sperimentale quoted above.⁸⁰ "The reality of *our* time" Antonioni said he had striven to address in *Red Desert* is constituted by just this impact of the "outside" on the "inside," by the operations of the social on the psychic. Thus, in what Deleuze, paraphrasing Antonioni himself, has called the director's "bicycle-less neorealism," a "quest involving movement" (as the quest for

⁷⁷ Jean-Luc Godard, "*La notte, L'eclisse, l'aurora*: Intervista ad Antonioni" [1964] in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 258.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Though, for example, Frampton himself suggests that the fragmentation of *Zorns Lemma* denotes a post-Renaissance subject, for whom "spatial representation" has lost "rectilinearity." See: Gidal, "Interview with Hollis Frampton," 99.

⁸⁰ Antonioni, "A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work," 199.

the bicycle in De Sica's famous film⁸¹) is replaced by "a specific weight of time operating inside the characters and excavating them from within."⁸²

During his CSC lecture, Antonioni goes to some length to discuss the development of his cinematic strategies to this effect. Initially, he recounts, referring in particular to his early *Cronaca di un amore* (*Story of a Love Affair*, 1950):

I felt the best way to capture their [the characters'] thoughts, their states of mind, was to follow them around physically with the camera. Thus the long shots, the continuous panning, etc. Later, however, as I went along [...] I became aware that perhaps this was not the best method after all, that perhaps I was concentrating too much on the external aspects of the actors' states of mind, and not enough on the states of mind themselves.⁸³

Long shots and continuous panning proved to be inadequate to communicate "the states of mind themselves," Antonioni explains. They end up being too much of an external *description*. Whereas, given the sense of their abstractedness and inherent resistance to "figuration," what he seems to want is something functioning as almost an *inscription* – or, even, like the concealment of a secret message *within* an apparent one, an *encryption* – of this interiority in the very matter of the film. After all, how else to convey, cinematically speaking, what Freud, precisely objecting to their figuration in film, had called "our abstractions"?⁸⁴ Slavoj Žižek would suggest that Antonioni is invoking that dimension which Michel Chion has termed "*rendu*," whereby "the content [...] is 'rendered' by the very form of the film," "the 'message'

⁸¹ *The Bicycle Thief*, released in 1948.

⁸² Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 23.

⁸³ Antonioni, "A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work," 221.

⁸⁴ See above, footnote 38.

is [...] the form itself.”⁸⁵ And, indeed, Antonioni seems to corroborate this, talking of “form” in his films as an attempt “to fill the image with a greater suggestiveness,” “beyond the strictly figurative.”⁸⁶

The Italian critic Lorenzo Cuccu has noted that *La notte*, released at the beginning of 1961, only a few months before the CSC talk, was the first of Antonioni’s films in which straight cuts completely replaced dissolves.⁸⁷ Up to *L’avventura* (1960), in fact – though less conspicuously there than in, say, *Il grido* (1957), with its slow merging of fade-outs and fade-ins – the director had tended to use dissolves to “soften” the spatio-temporal transitions between different sequences. Chiming with Deleuze’s later argument, Cuccu’s interpretation of this change is as a more widespread symptom of a self-consciously modern cinema.⁸⁸ Antonioni’s change of tack, for example, coincides almost exactly with Resnais’s (and Alain Robbe-Grillet’s) decision to eliminate from *Last Year at Marienbad* a series of dissolves they had initially thought they would use. On realizing that these would have brought to the film’s temporality an unwanted smoothness and gradualness, they replaced them with straight cuts.⁸⁹ For Cuccu, paradoxically, Antonioni’s turn from dissolve to cut makes *La notte* and the subsequent films appear like “one very long sequence.”⁹⁰ In a way, he is right. As Antonioni, in his own words, decides to throw out of the window “all those connective links between sequences, where one sequence served as the springboard for the one that followed,” the very idea of

⁸⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 43. Michel Chion outlines his notion of *rendu* in “Quiet Revolution...and Rigid Stagnation” [1987], trans. Ben Brewster, *October* 58 (Fall 1991), 69-80.

⁸⁶ Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 201.

⁸⁷ Lorenzo Cuccu, *La visione come problema: Forme e svolgimento del cinema di Antonioni* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973), 77.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Cf. Chatman, *Antonioni, or The Surface of the World*, esp. 115-117 and 127-131.

⁸⁹ Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet, “Last Words on *Last Year*” [1962], in Geduld, *Film Makers on Film Making*, 171. The text is an adaptation of André Labarthe and Jacques Rivette, “Entretien avec Alain Resnais et Alain Robbe-Grillet,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 21 (September 1961), 1-22.

⁹⁰ Cuccu, *La visione come problema*, 77.

“transition” is eliminated.⁹¹ But, as gradualness and progression disappear, what is brought into relief is precisely the fact that the duration of these, in Cuccu’s view, “sequence-less” films is inherently disconnected, discontinuous, heterogeneous.⁹² Like “the rhythm of life” Antonioni describes, the weft of these films is woven with the very discontinuities, which, according to Bachelard, are the “decisive centres of time.”⁹³ Not only, *pace* Cuccu, *between*, but also *within* sequences, it is precisely the cut that becomes increasingly and emphatically present throughout Antonioni’s films of the 1960s – breaking up scenes from within and eliminating “springboard[s]” between them.⁹⁴ Some of the sudden reframings in *L’avventura* (as when Sandro and Claudia, in their search for Anna, arrive at the uncannily deserted village in inland Sicily), or the unsignposted temporal ellipses in *L’eclisse* (as when Vittoria goes “African”), are particularly memorable. And indeed they are probably all the more memorable precisely because unexpected; introducing a radical hiatus within the same sequence, the disorientation they initially engender is even greater. The effect achieved through these cuts is similar to that in *Last Year at Marienbad*, where, throughout, disorientation (both temporal and spatial) is central to the film. Coinciding with Antonioni’s renewed resolution to focus more directly on “the states of mind themselves,” the cut thus becomes, in terms reminiscent of Benjamin and Kracauer, Antonioni’s *rendu* (to use Chion’s term) of the subjective experience of the time *of* modernity, and of time *in* modernity. This, vividly encapsulated in *Red Desert*, finds a parallel in *Last Year*, which Resnais, as we have seen, had described

⁹¹ Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 202.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 54 and 65.

⁹⁴ Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 202.

in terms similar to Antonioni's as an attempt to get to "thought" and "its mechanisms."⁹⁵

Inside Out: "The Reality of Our Time", On Screen

With its concentration on the neurotic Giuliana, *Red Desert* is undoubtedly the culmination of Antonioni's effort to presents us with, as Aristarco had put it, "an analysis of the psychic machinery itself."⁹⁶ In *Red Desert*, where the world is stricken by modernity as if by a plague, and "transfigured" by progress "to the point of becoming monstrous," "the reality of our time" is portrayed, Antonioni explains, through Giuliana's eyes.⁹⁷ By adopting what Pier Paolo Pasolini has termed the "free indirect point-of-view" (the character's subjective view independent of his/her contingent, physical point-of-view), the film enacts her alienated subjectivity, exteriorising her psyche, unrolling it on the screen, so to speak.⁹⁸ Indeed, the attempts to express "the reality of our time," and to focus "on the states of mind themselves" are shown to coincide. As for Benjamin and Kracauer, so for Antonioni, modernity, and time as such within it, are indissociable from the subject, whose experience is at the same time constitutive *of* them, and (re)constituted *by* them. Giuliana's neurosis, moreover, is presented not so much as an isolated pathology but as an acute manifestation of the impact of radically changing socio-historical conditions on the modern subject in general, a subject who, Antonioni feels, is often

⁹⁵ Resnais, "Trying to Understand My Own Film," 160.

⁹⁶ Aristarco, "Literary Cinema," 162.

⁹⁷ Antonioni, "Il deserto rosso," 253 cited.

⁹⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The 'Cinema of Poetry'" [1965], in *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), esp. 178-79. Angela Dalle Vacche develops Pasolini's position in her discussion of Antonioni's strategy as "visual ventriloquism." See Angela Dalle Vacche, "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*. Painting as Ventriloquism and Colour as Movement," in *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (London: Athlone Press, 1996).

too slow to “adapt to the new ‘technique’ of life.”⁹⁹ As a limit case – at a peak in her crisis her lover consoles her by saying “we all have [your illness] a little” – Giuliana becomes exemplary of the dramatic moment of reconfiguration of subjectivity Antonioni feels lies “behind industrial transformation,” and of which his cinema is both diagnosis and symptom.¹⁰⁰

Red Desert was Antonioni’s first colour film. In line with the attempt to present Giuliana’s “view,” colour is used expressionistically rather than realistically, and Antonioni opted to give hues a predominantly faded, bleached-out look, apart from isolated, and occasional, surges of vivid reds, greens, yellows or blues.¹⁰¹ So, for example, the yellow smoke of the refinery, Giuliana’s dark green coat, or the bright-red wooden walls of the hut by the sea will stand out from the polluted muddiness and fog of the surrounding landscape (ill. 5, p. 333). But, as well as being his first colour film, it is also Antonioni’s choppiest. The cutting rhythm is faster and more fragmented than in his earlier works. Talking about the film after its release, Antonioni commented on the relation between colour and editing pace:

For *Red Desert*, I have chosen very short shots. Perhaps it was colour which demanded this, insinuating this deep need to treat it in blots, as if they were pulsations penetrating confusedly into the character.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 252.

¹⁰⁰ Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 252. See also the talk at the CSC, where Antonioni comments on our psychology and morality as lagging behind material change: Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 209. Deleuze draws on this in his *Cinema II*, where he discusses Antonioni’s cinema as staging a dichotomy between a “tired, worn-out, neurotic body” and a “modern [artificial] brain,” 215.

¹⁰¹ In addition to using special filters, Antonioni famously also resorted to altering objects and, even, landscapes to be filmed by applying paint on them directly. Most notorious is perhaps his having a whole wood outside Ravenna painted white, in order, when filming, to obtain the desired greyish hue (unfortunately, the scene was in the end not shot as the sunshine was too bright). Michelangelo Antonioni, “Il bosco bianco,” in *Il deserto rosso*, ed. Carlo di Carlo (Bologna: Cappelli, 1964).

Antonioni is here not simply, or not quite, saying that “very short shots” are the medium *for* colour in the film, but, rather, he is outlining a correspondence between them. By aligning the film’s sustained work of cutting with its treatment of colour as “blots,” he suggests that Giuliana’s mental state is rendered not simply through the hue, the “look” of colour in the film, but through the film’s dynamics. Thinking of colour itself as perceptual pulsation, intrinsically mobile, Antonioni is postulating a formal equivalence between short shot and colour, suggesting that it is *as if* the rapid cutting could both evoke and enact the way in which colours – as stimuli from the outside – are experienced by Giuliana *as* “pulsations.”¹⁰³ Cutting, that is, is presented as the cinematic form through which the very dynamics of the subject’s “psychic machinery” is enacted, rendered.

This idea of colours as stimuli, sampled by the subject intermittently, according to an on/off, on/off dynamics, is reminiscent of the syncopated functioning of consciousness described by Freud in “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad,” or, similarly, by Frampton. Yet, we seem far from the regular interruptions hinted at by either of them. With its “pulsations penetrating *confusedly* into the character,” the working Antonioni evokes is disorderly, irregular, almost a mechanism on the verge of breaking, wreaking havoc within the subject, rather than keeping it ticking over. Though, like *Zorns Lemma*, *Red Desert* employs cutting and the cut itself as a *rendu* – as content “rendered” by film form – of the mechanics of the mind, in Antonioni’s film we do not have the highly ordered systematicity, or the smooth dynamics orchestrated by Frampton. The “psychic machinery” *Red Desert* both enacts *and*

¹⁰² Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 251.

¹⁰³ When working as a film critic in the 1940s, Antonioni, drawing on Hegel’s aesthetics, had written about colour as “infinite oscillations of movement.” See: Michelangelo Antonioni, “I suggerimenti di Hegel,” *Cinema* 155 (December 1942), 702-703. For a discussion on the relation between colour, movement and the pictorial in Antonioni, *vis à vis* the anti-pictorial concerns of the art of the period,

constructs is one that misses beats and gets stuck: that of a subject, as Giuliana's husband Ugo puts it, who "isn't able to mesh" ("non riesce a ingranare") and is, one may say, therefore "out of gear." Indeed, while in *Zorns Lemma* the cut was a motor, denoting that which propels consciousness and gives rise to "the pointed sense of the passage of time," as Frampton put it, here it is a halt.¹⁰⁴ It is something that engulfs and stalls the subject, blocking or undoing his or her sense of time's passage.

This use of the cut to denote and model, rather than a simple "interruption," a slippage or breakage in subjectivity and the experience of time, chimes, as mentioned, with its function in *Last Year at Marienbad*. Here, in fact, the cut articulates the paradox of what Alain Robbe-Grillet – who wrote the film's screenplay – will later describe as "time cut off from its temporality," a time that "doesn't flow anymore."¹⁰⁵ Relentlessly punctuated by straight editing cuts, *Last Year* is also, moreover, often internally split by an unsynchronized soundtrack. Crucially, the off-screen narration of the male protagonist (played by Giorgio Albertazzi, called "X" in the script) is often at odds with the unfolding imagery.¹⁰⁶ Did the two main characters meet and have an affair at Marienbad the year before? Was it there, or then? Did he rape her, or did she give herself to him spontaneously? Did anything, in fact, ever take place at all? Throughout, the cut is used to *disconnect*, unhinge and confuse temporal (and spatial) co-ordinates, thus at the same time demonstrating the characters' own disorientation as to what happened when, and arousing it in the viewers. What, in relation to the story, counts as past or

see: Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), esp. 171-172.

¹⁰⁴ Gidal, "Interview with Hollis Frampton," 101.

¹⁰⁵ Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Time and Description in Contemporary Narrative" [1963], in *Snapshots* [1962] and *Towards a New Novel* [1963], trans. Barbara Wright (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), 151.

¹⁰⁶ Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Introduction," in *Last Year at Marienbad: A Ciné-Novel* [1961], trans. Richard Howard (London: John Calder, 1962), 10.

present, memory, fantasy or reality is fundamentally muddled up, rendered radically ambiguous and, in the end, indiscernible. The most glaring indicators of the temporal disruptions introduced by the cuts are perhaps the outfits of the female protagonist (Delphine Seyrig, “A” in the script), a range of dresses and gowns in either black *or* white. As they often change from one shot to the other, they alert us to, and function as “precipitates” of, the discontinuities through which the film is woven. So, a shot where, in white, A is shown walking through the corridors and salons of the grand baroque palace, may be cut and resumed by one in which, though apparently following on the action of the preceding one, or reversing it, she is wearing black. Or, more subtly, she may come to be in an only *slightly* different outfit of the same colour, as when, framed talking to X on a bench in the park, a cut yields a scene identical to the previous one in all but the *model* of her (still) white dress. This, however, seems random rather than logical. There is no distinguishable pattern by which we can safely associate one colour with the past, memory or fantasy, and the other with the present, or reality. Indeed, in contemporary interviews, Resnais and Robbe-Grillet themselves played up to this undecidability, staging disagreement over what and when may or may not have happened at Marienbad.¹⁰⁷ Constructed through such recursive alternation and mirroring, doubling and re-doubling between shots (also echoed by the repetitious structure of the dialogue), *Last Year* uses the cut as the operation of interruption and disconnection through which a time that “doesn’t flow anymore” is articulated.¹⁰⁸ The film evokes a time that is not simply discontinuous, stop and start, but repetitive and circular, stumbling again and again over the very interruptions, the very gaps.

¹⁰⁷ Cf: Leutrat, *L’année dernière à Marienbad*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Robbe-Grillet, “Time and Description in Contemporary Narrative,” 151.

While *Red Desert*'s thread of events is not as obscured by the cutting as is that of *Last Year*, a similar strategy, with radical, rapid re-framings and jump cuts, is employed to embody the breaking up of Giuliana's time, her missing beats. This emerges pointedly in one of the sequences dedicated to Giuliana's recurrent "crises." Disturbed by the fact that her son has feigned paralysis, she has left her house and wandered around the town, eventually ending up at the hotel where Corrado, an old school friend of Ugo's is staying. Unlike the distant and cold Ugo, Corrado has shown her some sympathy and understanding – he is himself at a point of crisis in his life – and the two will embark on a brief affair. Increasingly distraught, we see her run down a stark white, futuristic-looking hotel corridor, and enter Corrado's room (ill. 6, p. 334). The wood panelling partly covering the room, the thick curtain and carpet, the brown or red no-frills angular furniture, make the room severe and cosy, conveying a sense of both entrapment and protection. It is here, as the two talk and then make love (an attempt on his side to "calm" her and/or take advantage of the situation?), that Giuliana's crisis unfolds. As her crisis reaches its peak, the cutting becomes increasingly fast, jerky and disconnected. The electronic, "metallic," noises, reminiscent of radio-wave interferences, that pierce the room in brief bursts (discussed in Chapter 3), and which Giuliana alone seems to hear, also earmark her acutely disturbed state. It is as if the dysfunctional "mechanism" of Giuliana's mind, generating *and* experiencing a temporal flow on the verge of disintegration, radical breakage, were embedded in the cinematic tempo, at the level of both the image and the sound track. As her "rhythm" starts to malfunction, glitch, miss, or repeat beats, get stuck, so does the pace of the unfolding sequence, a far cry from the controlled, regular metre of Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*.

From the initial shot-reverse-shot alternation between the two characters, through to the more confusing shots towards the end, when both spatial and temporal co-ordinates become unclear, the sequence's flow is continuously not simply interrupted, but, more strongly, *disrupted* by cuts. As it follows and embodies the crescendo of Giuliana's crisis, the scene is chopped up by drastic and sudden re-framings, obtained through jump cuts (and, to the same effect, some zip pans), which, in a different context, Žizek has characterized as "hystericizing" film (ills. 7 and 8, pp. 335-36).¹⁰⁹ Rather than moving towards them gradually, the camera skips to different corners of the room (the bare walls, the bed's red metal railing, a sofa by the window), and/or the actors' faces and bodies (often cropped, as in the views of Giuliana's writhing legs), generating an effect both of disconnection and of collision. Indeed, the "shocks and collisions" of "moving through traffic" that film, according to Benjamin, "established as a formal principle," thus recapitulating the quintessence of the experience of modernity, are here literally, and doubly, internalized: brought into the enclosed space of the room, and made an obvious marker of psychic life.¹¹⁰

Especially as, towards the end of the sequence, Giuliana and/or Corrado move between the bed, the window, and the sofa there, this series of cuts engenders a certain degree of confusion as to where exactly the lovers are in the room. Certainly, the lack of establishing shots, and the prevalence of medium and close-up views, together with the relative darkness of the scene at this point, also contribute to this confusion. The disorientation that ensues from this spatial disconnectedness is also, pointedly, temporally inflected. As the film shifts rapidly between enigmatic shots of Giuliana by the window alone, then, apparently, back on the bed, fending off

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Žizek, *Looking Awry*, 96. In relation to a traumatic scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), Žizek talks of its "'hystericized' tracking shot." The "tracking" across a room onto one of the birds' disfigured victims is obtained, instead, through a fast succession of jump cuts, drawing precipitously, without transition, into the scooped-out eye.

Corrado's embrace, or, again, on the sofa by the window with and then without Corrado, we realize that these cuts are also indices of time, cuts in time. While they are temporal ellipses, they are not such that through them the succession of events is told, though discontinuously, in a linear and smooth progression. Indeed, in its use of cutting, this scene offers a micro-view of the stories without "connective links," without "logical narrative transitions," which Antonioni starts to tell in the 1960s.¹¹¹ The cuts, as Deleuze says, gain hold "in themselves," as something *between* images, and which, though not exactly at the same level as in *Zorns Lemma*, replaces a logical and hypotactical organization of shots with a more paratactical and serial arrangement. More than ellipses, these cuts are *holes* in time: they radically disrupt and break up the temporality of the scene. As they riddle it with lacunae, they render it murky, awkward, even ambiguous as to the interpretation of *before* and *after*. It is through this work of cutting that Antonioni exteriorizes the dynamics of Giuliana's psyche, at the same time embodying *and* constructing cinematically the radically heterogeneous, and irregularly discontinuous time she experiences and, as Laplanche would say, "secretes."¹¹²

The Time of the Cut

Giuliana's crisis in Corrado's room ends with a puzzling twist. A glimpse of their lovemaking is interrupted by a cut onto what looks almost like a still life, though an

¹¹⁰ Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 171.

¹¹¹ Antonioni, "A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work," 202.

¹¹² The human being, has Laplanche puts it, has "the capacity [...] of creating, of secreting – *sic tenia verbo* – his own time." Laplanche, "Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation," 162.

odd one: a composition, somewhat frivolous in its pinks and whites (literally painted on the objects) of books and lampshade on a night table. A close-up of Giuliana asleep follows, which then cuts to a shot showing the whole room. This reveals that, suffused in a pastel-colour light, perhaps reverberating from the pink walls and the tulle curtains, the room is a completely unfamiliar one, looking neither like Corrado's, nor Giuliana's at home. Where, or what *is* this room?

Let us recall Antonioni's provocative assertions with regard to time in the cinema, ostensibly split between his intolerance of "real time," because of its excess of "useless moments," and his desire to include in film the very "pauses" constitutive of "the rhythm of life."¹¹³ Antonioni's agenda of inclusions and exclusions is one, paradoxically, in which the moments deemed crucial and indispensable for the rendering of the modern subject's experience of time are precisely those when time itself seems to stop or wane. It is when it falters or freezes, it seems, as in neurosis – or, as I discuss in the next chapter, in boredom – that time in modernity must be sought and analysed. The puzzling ending to this sequence is emblematic of Antonioni's attempt to include in his films these stoppages, these gaps, to make their reality palpable, visible.

There is, here, a further resonance with *Last Year at Marienbad*. If, in fact, in Resnais's film the editing cuts may function as markers of the breaks, the lacunae in the characters' time, they also become the means through which the "negative" or "other" temporality of these breaks, of these lacunae themselves can be embodied as a "positive" on the screen.¹¹⁴ Through its cutting operations, that is, *Last Year* also strives to incarnate, to reify, the reality of the cut in time itself. This is perhaps best

¹¹³ See above, pp. 2-4.

¹¹⁴ On the cut – or, on the celluloid itself, the splice – as a "negative duration," that is, as a marker of a segment of time left out of the film, see Pier Paolo Pasolini's essays "The Theory of Splices" [1971] and "The Rheme" [1971], in *Heretical Empiricism*.

crystallized in a scene in which A (who is *the* “amnesiac” in the film, though X is ridden by certain doubts too) is listening to X’s recollection of some detail of their alleged encounter the previous year. The scene is rather dark: the characters are leaning against the counter of the bar in the dimly lit palace, Seyrig is wearing black. At a point, this is interrupted by a very rapid insert of Seyrig, in white, standing in front of a window inundating with light the surrounding space. Repeated several times, this generates a pulsating effect. Introduced by cuts whose “moments” themselves seem brought into relief (perhaps extended by some blank frames), these luminous inserts are in a way the reverse of these cuts, their flip-side. Rather literal “flashbacks,” they visualize the time “lost” by A (whether real or imagined), and, that, though we “see” it on the screen, she is apparently unable to “find” again. With their violent bursting into the film, to a certain extent they conjure up the radically heterogeneous and discontinuous image of time evoked by Benjamin when he wrote that the present is “shot through with chips” of the past.¹¹⁵ Here, Deleuze’s notion of the cut as a *topos* of modern cinema is both literalized and, in a way, turned inside out. The “interval,” the “interstice” itself becomes an image. At play in the otherness of the inserts is the cut as thing, segment – both spatial and temporal –, employed to articulate, by turning it into a “positive” on screen, the “negative,” or flip-sided temporality *of* the cut in time itself.

Where here the inserts embody X’s “flashback,” the pink room in *Red Desert* incarnates Giuliana’s “blackout.” In its puzzling alterity, the pink room is an embodiment of Giuliana’s cut *in* time, and of the time *of* this cut, rendered, quite literally, as an image of “another place.” Through its focus on neurosis, *Red Desert* has other such moments of blackout, or in fact, of “blacking out,” as when the screen

¹¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” [1940], in *Illuminations*, 255.

fills with fog and turns white, momentarily obliterating not only the characters but the cinematic image itself. The most striking, though, is the famously odd interlude of the picture-perfect island, almost “an antifilm within the film,” as Millicent Marcus has called it, that does not so much divide the film in two parts as break into it.¹¹⁶ Here, a solitary girl swims peacefully in crystalline waters and is caressed by soft pink sand and rounded rocks. Man – or more precisely, and perhaps tellingly, woman – and nature, subject and object, organic and inorganic, seem to interpenetrate and blend into each other.¹¹⁷ The girl is at one with her surrounding landscape and its cyclical rhythms; and the landscape, on the other hand, is anthropomorphic: the rocks, Giuliana says, are “like flesh” and “everything” sings with a sweet female’s voice. Where throughout the rest of the movie the “desert” of the title can be associated with a poisoned and sinister industrialized landscape, here it becomes synonymous with an earthly paradise. Dull hues give way to bright colours, haziness to crisply focused images, the noise of machinery to the lull of the waves, electronic music to a solo singing voice.¹¹⁸

A stark contrast to the rest of the film in both style and setting, the ostensible justification for this sequence is a story Giuliana tells her son (who, as mentioned, is pretending to be paralysed), of which, accompanied by her off-screen narration, it provides the visual illustration. Yet, in its radical otherness and dream-like vividness it also stands out, in a film portraying reality through Giuliana’s gaze, as her own reverie, or fantasy. The way in which the sequence is wedged into the film reinforces

¹¹⁶ Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 202.

¹¹⁷ On this, see Marcus’s discussion, *ibid.* Focusing on the figure of the pubescent girl, Sitney has also offered a reading of this sequence that draws a parallel between environmental and sexual “pollution.” See: Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema*, esp. 216-217.

¹¹⁸ As Antonioni himself has pointed out, this, shot in Technicolor, is the only point in the film where the colours of reality have not been tampered with by using filters, or even, as mentioned, by directly painting parts of the landscape or objects to be filmed. See Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 253.

this effect. At one end, in fact, it comes after a shot in which Giuliana apparently *puts off* telling her son the story he wants. At the other, the film avoids showing us the child again, but inter-cuts close-ups of an absorbed Giuliana with views of the bleak reality outside the window (the house looks out on the industrial port). Almost like a foreign body in the predominant fabric of the film, yet still *part of it*, this sequence chimes with the way in which fantasy has been described in psychoanalysis as an “intrusion” on the ego of “another level of itself,” causing “a break in its continuity.”¹¹⁹ But fantasies, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok have also written, as they do this, are paradoxical, in that they “indicate the [very] denial of a gap.”¹²⁰ In other words, they try to patch the very breach of which they are at once cause and symptom. And *Red Desert*’s pink beach is indeed a scenario of plenitude, unity and continuity, which, nevertheless, points to the “gap” in Giuliana’s psyche, marks what Antonioni has called her moment of “absence.”¹²¹ Underlining, in fact, the idea of a symbiotic relationship between the film and its protagonist, Antonioni has said that there “the plot is suspended, as if the eye and consciousness of the narrator had absented themselves.”¹²² Yet, this twin “suspension” of the film and the subject’s consciousness is made, and presented as, integral to both, part of the film as such, and of the psyche it endeavours to narrate and embody, as an “other” within.

Interestingly, this time of the cut, this most private and interior moment of the subject, presented here as the “space” of fantasy, is also the most conventionally “cinematic” part of the film, both aesthetically and conceptually. The saturation and

¹¹⁹ Maria Torok, “Fantasy: An Attempt to Define Its Structure and Operation” [1959], in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 30.

¹²⁰ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation” [1972], in *The Shell and the Kernel*, 128 cited.

¹²¹ In *Cinema II*, Deleuze remarks that Antonioni’s characters suffer “less from the absence of another, then from their absence from themselves,” 9.

¹²² Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 253.

glossiness of the colours, and the stereotyped banality of the story (solitary girl, desert exotic island, mysterious sailing ship arriving) are redolent of the Hollywoodian spectacle, especially as, in the wake of the diffusion of television in the 1950s and 1960s, cinema upped the ante with more garishness and opulence (such as CinemaScope, etc.).¹²³ And this perhaps throws into relief how, more than simply helping to visualize and embody time and its others (i.e. its “suspensions” or its “negatives”), cinema participates in their very (con)figuration. The experience and cognition of time and temporality in modernity are shaped *through* the cinematic in fundamental ways. Time’s discontinuity and heterogeneity, the very idea of a “mixed” model of time, made up of different temporalities, is not simply “incarnated” by the cinema, but it is also “produced” by it.



In an essay entitled “The Instant” (1932) – largely a refutation of Bergson’s concept of lived time as continuous duration – Bachelard argued that, despite numerous attempts to discover and experience this sense of duration inside himself, he “remained [...] quite incapable of finding these endless, unbroken lines within us.” “However small the fragment under consideration,” he continues, “always it was the embroidery that we saw, never the fabric.”¹²⁴ My focus in this chapter has been with some of the ways in which, through the fundamental operation of the cut, the cinema

¹²³ André Bazin, “Will CinemaScope Save the Film Industry?” [1953], in Jeffrey Show and Peter Weibl, eds., *The Cinematic Imaginary After Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), is an interesting contemporary reflection on that moment of crisis for the cinema.

¹²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, “The Instant” [1932], trans. Mary McAllester Jones, in Robin Durie, ed., *Time and the Instant: Essays in the Physics and Philosophy of Time* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 77.

may be seen to represent, inform and *form* this sense of the “embroidery” of time, if not, even, of time *as* embroidery. For Bachelard time is an “embroidery,” as he explains in the slightly later *The Dialectic of Duration* (1936), because it is “a succession that is plainly heterogeneous, clearly marked by occurrences of newness and surprise and by breaks, cut too by voids.”¹²⁵ And whereas time may well “*appear* to be continuous,” it does so precisely “*through* its heterogeneity”: time, that is, “needs alterity” to look like a flow.¹²⁶ This view can be seen to chime, in important respects, with Antonioni’s reflection on the “rhythm of life” as made up of different “beat[s]” and punctuated by “pauses,” and with Frampton’s assertion that it is precisely the experienced interruption of time’s flow (“the cut in duration”) to give us a notion of its passage.¹²⁷

In Bachelard’s view, furthermore, time is truly paradoxical, or indeed, as he puts it, truly “dialectical,” because it “is really constructed starting from instants.”¹²⁸ Diametrically opposed to Bergson’s, Bachelard’s argument is that the instant, usually thought of as a sort of point – dimensionless, durationless, motionless – is the spark out of which the “dimension” of time emerges, the unit with which the “movement” of duration is threaded.¹²⁹ Thus, in Bachelard’s view, time is intrinsically dependent on what may appear to be antithetical to it: its length, extension and flow are borne out of contrary attributes – like, in a way, in the cinema.

In fact, whilst Bachelard’s ostensible subject is, of course, time, his descriptions (“a succession [...] marked by occurrences of newness and surprise and

¹²⁵ Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 47.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65. My emphasis.

¹²⁷ Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 202; Gidal, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 101.

¹²⁸ Bachelard, “The Instant,” 83.

¹²⁹ Cf. Robin Durie, “The Strange Nature of the Instant,” in Durie, *Time and the Instant*.

by breaks,” a “heterogeneity” striving for “continuity,” “constructed starting from instants”) could well function as an account of cinema – or of the aesthetic strategies peculiar to it. They could, indeed, be used to evoke the sustained, intermittent bombardment of colourful shots of *Zorns Lemma*, the desultory pace of *Last Year*, the unexpected “intrusion” of the beach sequence in *Red Desert*. And, as in Freud’s “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad,” it is possible that cinema might constitute Bachelard’s implicit referent. After all, Bergson, whose view Bachelard is confuting, had explicitly used cinema in *Creative Evolution* to describe what he saw as an erroneous and artificial understanding of time.

If the attributes of time Bachelard outlines sound cinematic (and, in this respect, whether he was in fact thinking of cinema is irrelevant), then it is not surprising that they seem to find a most vivid and concise crystallization in a cinematic meditation *on* cinema. This is a film by the American Gary Beydler, *Pasadena Freeway Stills* (1974), which conveys not only the “embroidered” nature of cinema – constructed of fragments stitched together, dependent on a tension between inclusions and exclusions – but, also, the stillness/movement oxymoron at its very core. The film – only approximately six minutes in length – starts with a male figure, face to the camera, intent on sticking a photograph within a rectangle outlined by masking tape on a glass surface in front of him. As the image-side of the print is turned towards us rather than him, a frame-within-the-frame effect ensues, reinforced by the contrast between the black and white of the photograph and the colour of the rest of the film. Showing cars entering a tunnel (probably, indeed, the Pasadena freeway), this still is then replaced, one after the other, by a series of apparently identical images. At first, the whole process of replacing the photographs within the rectangle is shown: we see the actor remove the print, place it on a table to

his right, select another image and stick it on the pane of glass. As the film goes on, however, this action is progressively edited, “cut out” of the film, with the result that, at a point, the interval between one black and white still and the other is all but eliminated. In a way, where we started by watching a colour film, we seem now to be left with a black and white one. The colour footage of the process of placing and replacing the stills that we understand to have been “excised” from the film, stands vividly in our memory as a “positive” segment, an image of what, paraphrasing Frampton, we could call “the duration of a cut.” And of these “excised” actions and their duration, a gentle throb – a trace – is left between one photo and the other. The contrast and alternation between colour and black and white shots had already created a sense of the film as a heterogeneous “patchwork.” This light quiver further evokes Bachelard’s metaphors of time as “embroidery”: a piece of fabric, a surface, on which he could not lose sight of the stitches. In fact, as we keep looking at the photographs – on which the camera now remains fixed in close-up – we notice that the cars are speeding through the tunnel. We thus realize that the film has, so to speak, taken us through the constitutive principles of the cinema as such: its historical origin and material basis in photographic stillness, “set in motion” by the projector.

Moving to the next chapter, it is not so much to these *as such* that I turn, as to the consideration of how photographic stillness “re-emerges” from within cinema during the 1960s and 1970s (as, indeed, Beydler’s film shows), and of how this relates to the problem of time.

Chapter 2: The Still

About thirty minutes into *L'eclisse* (*Eclipse*, 1962), there is a strange and striking sequence. It is late at night, but Vittoria is awake and banging a nail into the wall in order to hang a newly bought artefact in her modern apartment. Soon Anita, her neighbour and friend, is at the door. Although complaining about the noise on behalf of her husband, she herself, seemingly also unable to sleep, seems rather relieved to have found an excuse to have a chat and moan about her comfortable yet uneventful life, whose only pleasures appear to be sweets. For her part, Vittoria recounts how she spent the whole of the previous night awake too, breaking up with her long-term fiancé (a relationship, we infer from the film's initial sequence, which had dried up and become routinized). She is tired, but of a tiredness, she specifies, which is *not* sleepiness: "There are days," she tries to explain, "in which to have in your hands a needle, a piece of cloth, a book, a man, is the same thing." While they are talking, the phone rings. It is yet another neighbour, Marta, a white Kenyan who lives in the opposite building. She too cannot sleep, since a mixture of loneliness and frustrated homesickness keep her awake – her husband is temporarily away, and she will later explain that her life in Italy is empty: she never goes out and has nothing to do all day. Now, having seen the two conversing in Vittoria's illuminated flat through her window, she is calling to invite them over to hers for company. Thus wakefulness, insomnia, restlessness set the context for what is about to happen, and are the outward signs of the boredom these three women share: three women who should be still (i.e. asleep), but are, instead, still moving.

At this point, the scene cuts to a wall in a dark interior, on which is a large photograph of an African woman in tribal dress. It is through this silent and static shot of a still image that Marta's apartment, as yet unidentified, is first introduced on the screen. This cut to the still sets the pace for what follows: the striking formal theme of the unfolding sequence is in fact the filming of photographs. Marta's flat is like a reliquary or, perhaps, a kitsch souvenir-shop: large photographic images of Kenya are tacked to the walls, and a multitude of ethnic artefacts lies scattered around its open-plan layout. Vittoria browses around the flat, lazily perusing the pictures on the walls; Anita, reclining on the bed, looks unexcitedly at the images of an illustrated book through which Marta leafs as she talks of Africa. The camera alternates between the women and the photos. Indeed, it is on these latter in particular that it emphatically lingers, whether with a static close-up, by gently zooming into a detail, or by unhurriedly panning across their whole surfaces. Protractedly framing the stills full-screen, the camera, with its almost torpid movements, emphasizes their nature as photographic objects: their flatness, their grainy texture, the stasis of their imagery.

The co-presence of the boredom of the three women and the still photographs is not incidental: on the contrary, it is precisely through the women's (and particularly Vittoria's) relation to the photographs that their boredom is articulated. Via the photographs, boredom is specified as a problem of modernity, and of time *in* modernity. Furthermore, it is again through the women's engagement with the stills that boredom's relation to "distraction," a term with which the critical history of boredom itself is linked, is crystallized. The scene, in fact, shows how distraction may be a form *of* boredom, rather than its antidote. Articulated through distraction

and other terms, such as restlessness, that might appear antithetical to it, the scene encapsulates the paradoxes or contradictions inherent in the condition.

But boredom enters *L'eclisse* at the formal as well as at the diegetic level. In addition to being a hinge for the women's state represented in the narrative, the photographs also have a key role in its "formal" rendering. Through them, in fact, is engendered an oscillation, a tension between stasis and motion that resonates with boredom's temporal structure. The insertion of the stills discloses the very dynamics by which Antonioni may be seen actively to court an aesthetics of boredom, transferring "narrative" boredom onto the spectator, making it "felt" as well as "seen" in the cinematic experience. *L'eclisse*, possibly one of Antonioni's slowest films, is exemplary of this mutual relation between the diegetic description and the structural incarnation of boredom, so that in the viewing experience boredom may be both represented and produced.

Antonioni's films are often described as "slow," and seen to possess a certain stillness. Adorno was struck by how in *La notte* (1961) this "uncinematic" quality "both provocatively denied and yet preserved, in negative form," the essential trait of the cinema, "the movement of objects."¹ Antonioni had, in fact, already pursued stillness and the photographic quite explicitly in his early short *L'amorosa menzogna* (*Loving Lie*, 1949). This dealt with the popular phenomenon of the *fotoromanzo* ("photoromances"), a photographic – and romantic – version of the comic-strip story, whose actors and readers stood in the shadow of the more glamorous world of Cinecittà.² In this pseudo-documentary (out of which Antonioni developed the script

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" [1966], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1993), 156.

² For a study on the phenomenon of the *fotoromanzo* in Italy, see: Maria Teresa Anelli et al., *Fotoromanzo: fascino e pregiudizio – storia, documenti e immagini di un grande fenomeno popolare 1946-1978* (Rome: Savelli, 1979). Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge to Mass Culture 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000),

for *The White Sheik*³), the movie camera captures the actors while they “freeze” into a succession of poses for the still camera – whose static images are in the context of the *fotoromanzo* the very backbone of narrative movement. Where *L’amorosa menzogna* addressed photographic stasis as, physically, the very foundation of cinema, it also suggested that, culturally, this form had become subaltern to the moving image. With *L’eclisse* and, later, *Blow-up* (1966), Antonioni continued his exploration of the photographic image, both in terms of its positioning and significance within visual culture, and of its stillness in relation to cinematic movement. Indeed, in these films, this “uncinematic” quality which Adorno diagnosed in Antonioni’s work is fixed, exposed and literalized in the stills punctuating them.

Where the 1960s and 1970s were a time of intensive reflection on photographic stillness in relation to, and within, movement, this was also a period in which boredom became strongly thematized. Boredom, in the arts at least, became of interest not only as a condition to be analysed and yet, if possible, avoided, but as a phenomenon to be actively taken up aesthetically – taken up by extending duration, dragging out time. As we have seen, Antonioni argued that the “pauses” of time, the slits in which time itself seems to stop or wane, should be included in film – because, in his view, they would, in fact, constitute the very core of “modern cinema.”⁴ If

briefly discussing the *fotoromanzo* notes how, though the medium was in the first instance a “by-product of the cinema age,” crucially, it also reached peasant and remote audiences for whom cinema itself was “a very distant reality,” 34. Thus, for these audiences, the still image was the medium that also gave them some form of vicarious access to the moving image as such.

³ Federico Fellini’s *The White Sheik* (*Lo sceicco bianco*, 1952), which picks up and expands the theme and visual motifs of *L’amorosa menzogna*, should have been Antonioni’s first feature-length film. For a series of reasons, the story ended up being sold to the producer Carlo Ponti, who gave the direction to Fellini. Aldo Tassone, “La storia del cinema la fanno i film” [interview with Antonioni, 1979], in *Fare un film è per me vivere, Scritti sul cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), 176.

⁴ Michelangelo Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work” [1961], in Harry M. Geduld, ed., *Film Makers on Film Making: Statements on Their Art by Thirty Directors* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 202. Antonioni’s project is of course related to

these, as I discussed in the previous chapter, may denote a moment of crisis, of neurosis even, when the subject's (experience of) time breaks down, they may also, and not necessarily at the exclusion of the former, be indicative of the condition of boredom. Thus, Antonioni's pursuit of "the idle periods of everyday banality,"⁵ as Gilles Deleuze has put it, chimes in many important respects with Andy Warhol's often-quoted assertion that he "like[d] boring things."⁶

Here, I propose and explore an interrelation between this (re)emergence of photographic stillness within cinema and boredom. Focusing on a number of experimental works, and in particular Hollis Frampton's *nostalgia* (1971), as well as *Blow-up*, I begin by considering the formal aspects, dynamics and implications of this encounter between cinema and photography, stasis and motion, within the terrain of the cinematic. I then move on to discuss how in *L'eclisse* the thematization of photography's visual culture bears on the articulation of boredom as a problem of modernity, and of the occupancy of time *in* modernity. Locating Antonioni's films in the wider context of the "pursuit of boredom," as we may call it, of the 1960s and 1970s, I conclude by returning to the phenomenology of stillness in the cinema, which is, in fact, *still* moving. This oxymoron of a motionlessness *in* movement echoes the very experience of time in boredom. For, in boredom, time comes to be felt as just this contradictory structure, as its passage is experienced as a painful

neorealism's pursuit of the ordinary and the everyday. His early documentaries *Gente del Po* (*People of the Po*, shot 1942-43; edited and released 1947) and *Nettezza Urbana* (*N.U.*, 1948) informed, and were informed by, a neorealist programme and aesthetics. However, Antonioni's focus in the later films is significantly different from neorealism. Where the latter aimed to highlight the tragedies to be found *within* the lives of ordinary people (as Zavattini once put it, "I'm interested in the dramas of things we happen to encounter, not those we plan") Antonioni shows that the real problem is, in a way, the very absence of drama. Cesare Zavattini, "Some Ideas on the Cinema" [1952], *Sight and Sound* 23 (October-December 1953), 64-69; 69 cited. For a discussion of the ways in which neorealism's emphasis on the ordinary may be seen to inform the aesthetics of boredom of 1960s and 1970s filmmaking, see: Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), esp. chapter 1.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* [1985], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 5.

tension between mobility and immobility; something that passes and, yet, fails to pass soon enough.

Still, Moving: Photography in Cinema

Frampton once wrote that Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographs, which slightly predate the "birth" of the movies, represent "a point of disjunction between the still photograph and cinema."⁷ These images incorporate successive exposures of a body in motion on a single plate.⁸ The static sequencing of Marey's photos, which on occasions results in a blur where, so to speak, movement is frozen somewhat between analysis and synthesis, was for Frampton a symbol of the point at which the kinesis of cinema originated from *within* photographic stasis (ill. 9, p. 337).⁹ Thus,

⁶ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol '60s* [1980] (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 50.

⁷ Hollis Frampton, "Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract," *Artforum* 11 (March 1973), 43-52. 50 cited.

⁸ For a comprehensive study of Marey's work see: Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) and François Dagognet, *Etienne-Jules Marey: A Passion for the Trace* [1987], trans. Robert Galeta with Jeanine Herman (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

⁹ Marey's objective – like Muybridge's – was actually the opposite of what cinema attains. His aim, in fact, was not the synthesis of movement, but, precisely, its analysis and deconstruction into minimal, yet, of course, arbitrarily delimited, "components" made visible to the human eye thanks to camera technology. Though he did make one short film, Marey, as Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, did not simply have little interest in the medium, but actually resisted it, seeing its "illusionistic" essence at odds with scientific endeavours. See: Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency and the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), ch. 2. A similar point is made by Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. and ed. Ben Brewster (London: BFI, 1990), 10-11. Burch argues that, in line with the "science of the period," Muybridge's and Marey's interest lay with "analytic description" rather than "naturalistic representation," which was deemed to be "redundant" and "a regression" (emphasis in original). The scientific basis of Muybridge's work in particular, however, may itself be contestable. Braun (among others) has problematized it in her *Picturing Time*, esp. 237-251. From a careful analysis of Muybridge's 781 plates in his eleven-volume *Animal Locomotion* (1887), Braun has showed that Muybridge's sequencing in his composite plates is often an edited reconstruction, rather than a faithful reproduction of successive (reading the plates horizontally) and simultaneous (reading the plates vertically) views, as he had claimed. This is mainly because "void" plates and repeated plates are a frequent feature of his grids. See also Marta Braun, "The Expanding Present: Photographing

the very hybridity of Marey's images actually foretold the incipient separation between an art of stillness and one of movement, between, as Frampton puts it, "an illusionistic cinema of incessant motion and a static photographic art that remained frozen solid for decades."¹⁰

However, in this scenario of *disjunction*, the 1960s and 1970s inscribed a moment of *conjunction*. During these decades, in fact, stillness and the photographic image itself surfaced with particular insistence and intensity from *within* cinematic movement. The scene from *L'eclisse* discussed above, or Gary Beydler's *Pasadena Freeway Stills* (1974), in which – as we have seen in the previous chapter – black and white stills punctuate (and eventually "take over") the otherwise colour film, vividly convey this. On the one hand, actual filmed still images emerged prominently in a varied spectrum of works from the period. This spans from more overtly experimental pieces, such as Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and *One Second in Montreal* (1967 and 1969), to feature films such as Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973), Alan Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974) and, even, a "blockbuster" like George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). On the other, the stillness of the photographic may be seen to have seeped into the static quality of Andy Warhol's notorious early films, the near-immobility of Bruce Nauman's and Yoko Ono's slow-motion pieces, such as his *Pulling Mouth* (1969) or her *Eye Blink* (1966), or the motionless tableaux vivants of Marguerite Duras's *India Song* (1975).

As the didactic vein of *Pasadena Freeway Stills* shows, this (re)emergence of stillness and of the still itself in cinema took place in the context of the intensive inquiry into the nature and mechanics of cinema characterizing the period. This

Movement," in Ann Thomas, ed., *Beauty of Another Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

investigation of the material conditions of the medium, as I discuss in the general introduction, also spurred an interest in its early history and, indeed, pre-history. When Frampton wrote his observation on Marey, he was working on both still and moving images visually indebted to the French physiologist's time-photography (the photographic series *A Visitation from Insomnia*, 1970-1973 [ill. 10, p. 338] and the film *Vernal Equinox*, 1975, respectively). His remark, moreover, is drawn from an essay on that other important figure of cinema's "prehistory": Eadweard Muybridge. And in fact, at around the same time, Frampton also produced a photographic series that humorously pays homage to Muybridge's famous studies of animal and human motion. Subverting both the content and the title of the early photographer's eleven-volume collection *Animal Locomotion*, Frampton entitled his own series *Vegetable Locomotion* and, in imitation of the characteristic sequential template of Muybridge's composite images, portrayed a variety of vegetables "falling," "revolving" and "flying" (ill. 11, p. 339).¹¹ By reflecting on the basis *and* the origin of the cinematic in the photographic, as well as on their interrelation, Frampton's own work and writings testify to his involvement with a moment of rapprochement between the still and the moving image. The imagery and rapid montage of *Zorns Lemma* (1970) in many ways allude to photographic snapshots; and indeed, though there are no still images in it, Frampton once explained it as "a way of handling stills."¹² The following year, in 1971, Frampton made *nostalgia*, not only a much

1997), 172.

¹⁰ Frampton, "Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract," 50.

¹¹ For Frampton's series see: Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane, eds., *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/Recreations*, exhibition catalogue: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), esp. 70ff. Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion: An Electro-Photographic Investigation of Consecutive Phases of Animal Movement 1872-1885*, 11 vols. (Philadelphia, 1887).

¹² Peter Gidal, "Interview with Hollis Frampton" [London, 24 May 1972], *October* 32, *Hollis Frampton: A Special Issue* (Spring 1985), 93-117. 93 cited.

more “static” film than *Zorns Lemma*, but also one revolving entirely around the filming of still photographs.

Lasting approximately thirty-six minutes, *nostalgia* consists of thirteen static shots, each dedicated to one of Frampton’s own photographs (with the exception, to be precise, of the penultimate, which is a found photograph, and of the last one, to which I’ll come later). These, self-portraits, portraits of friends (including Carl Andre and James Rosenquist), images of places and objects (such as the artist’s studio, a loo that reminded him of the Crucifixion), refer to moments in Frampton’s life between his move to New York to practise as a photographer, in 1958, and the year he made the film, 1971. Shown on the same plane as the screen, as if they were pictures mounted on a wall facing us, the stills are accompanied by a first-person voiceover describing them and providing a series of autobiographical anecdotes. Yet, the film subverts the “documentary” idiom that the disembodied voice and the still as a “testimony” of the past might be seen to evoke. For the autobiographical commentaries are often mocking in tone, if not spurious and, disorientatingly, told not over the image they purport to “illustrate” but the one before it.¹³

Though filmed in close-up, the photographs do not quite fill the screen: the gaps left on each side, therefore, encase them in a sort of frame-within-the-frame, reinforcing the picture effect. Each print, “fixated” by the camera, is protractedly held in view. For Raymond Bellour, a freeze frame, a close-up on a photograph or, even, on the “immobility” of the face or a moment of inaction, are moments in which

¹³ The use of stills as “documents” of the past and of the disembodied narrating voice are typical of the idiom of the documentary (as, for example, in Alain Resnais’s *Nuit et Brouillard* [*Night and Fog*, 1955]). For Frampton’s comments on the pseudo-documentary nature of the film, which fuses autobiography and fiction, see Scott MacDonald, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” *Film Culture*, 67-9 (1979), 158-180; esp. 158-161. Philippe Dubois discusses the use of the photographs in *nostalgia* as “screens” behind, and through which the self is masked and fictionalized. See: Philippe Dubois, “Photography *Mise-en-Film*: Autobiographical (Hi)stories and Psychic Apparatuses,” trans. Lynne Kirby, in Patrice Petro, ed., *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

the very mobility of the cinematic seems to be negated, “stilled.” In such instances, film can be “grasped through the specter of photography,” a medium which, in fundamental ways, haunts cinema from within.¹⁴ For, historically speaking, the *still* photographic image was a precursor of the *moving* photographic image and, in the form of the film frame, also constitutes the inner skeleton of cinema itself.

The awareness thus afforded is also important, for Bellour, because it brings into relief how two seemingly antithetical, if complementary manifestations of time cohabit in the movies. This is to say that, even within the moving image, time, in Bellour’s view, may be contemplated in *stillness*, as well as in movement. Where André Bazin valued the cinema for the possibility it afforded of superseding the “frozen” instant of the photograph, Bellour instead admires its contrary capacity to return this frozen instant to full presence.¹⁵ For these outer signs of the photographic within the cinematic disclose the inherently oxymoronic structure of time itself in the cinema, whose dynamic flux is precisely composed of motionless points, instants seized and immobilized out of duration, re-animated mechanically.¹⁶ “These instants that suspend the time of movement,” as Bellour puts it, reveal and “open up, inside of time, another time,” the time of stillness which the photographic encapsulates.¹⁷

nostalgia seems to convey all this quite emphatically. In fact, the *whole* of the film is, as it were, “constructed” through photographs, its cinematic time

¹⁴ Raymond Bellour, “The Film Stilled,” trans. Alison Rowe and Elisabeth Lyon, *Camera Obscura* 24 (1990), 99-123. 105 cited. There are echoes, here, of Jean-Louis Baudry’s famous argument on photographic stillness – in the form of the film frame – as the “repressed” of cinema, in his “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” [1970], trans. Alan Williams, in Philip Rosen, ed. *Narrative/ Apparatus/Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). See also Raymond Bellour, “The Pensive Spectator” [1984], trans. Lynne Kirby, *Wide Angle* 9, *Special Issue on Film and Photography* (1987), 6-10 and Laura Mulvey, “Death 24 Times a Second: The Tension Between Stillness and Movement in the Cinema,” *Coil*, 9/10 (2000), unpaginated.

¹⁵ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” [1945], in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

composed, manifestly, of an articulation of stills, which, to some extent, mark and redouble the inner stasis of the film-frames themselves. In certain respects, this series of long, static shots of still images recalls a slide show. Yet *nostalgia* also differs fundamentally from such a presentation, because movement is inscribed *within* the images themselves. For, at a point, each of the photographs begins to blacken, shrivel up, smoke and burn until, eventually, it is completely carbonised (ill. 12, p. 340). And indeed, as the first photo slowly turns to ashes, we realize that the camera is not looking out, on to a wall, but down, on to an incandescent hotplate. It is this burning that introduces visible movement, and, with it, an index of the passage of time, of time *as* passage, *within* the otherwise static imagery. In so doing, it alerts us to the fact that this is a movie, a motion picture, and not a projection of stills.

Remastering/Remediation

Filmed by the movie camera, a still photograph is morphed into an object which, in many important, if obvious respects, is crucially different from a photographic print we can hold, handle and discard at will. At a remove from its original material support – in the pre-digital age, most commonly, the paper of the print –, a “cinematic photograph”¹⁶ is also, in a way, *less* material: projected onto the screen, it becomes physically impalpable. In fact, there is something paradoxical about the burning of the photographs in *nostalgia*, a sort of technological “alchemy” – even if the passage in question is not exactly from mud to gold. While the prints are

¹⁶ This was, in fact, the crux of Bergson’s argument against the cinema as an embodiment of the “real” duration of being, which is, according to him, a continuum. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* [1907], trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), esp. chapter 4.

¹⁷ Bellour, “The Film Stilled,” 108.

¹⁸ I take this expression from Corey J. Creekmur, “The Cinematic Photograph and the Possibility of Mourning,” *Wide Angle* 9 (1987), 42–49, in which he also discusses Frampton’s *nostalgia*.

carbonized on the electric hotplate, they are also recorded on film. As Frampton himself has put it: “they are not destroyed; they can be resurrected by rewinding the film.”¹⁹

Frampton was keen to problematize a reading of *nostalgia* in purely autobiographical terms. Stressing that a “diaristic memoir” or a “confessional” was not in his intention, he aligned the film with the predominantly phenomenological concerns of much of the contemporary avant-garde.²⁰ “The film is not about me,” he declared a few years after its release, thus echoing the motto “this is a film about you, not about its maker,” that, in large superimposed lettering, crowns George Landow’s *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1970).²¹ However, despite, or *along with*, these protestations, Frampton himself openly called the personal into play when discussing *nostalgia*, describing it as “a remastering of a certain number of lumps I took during those years as a still photographer in New York.” “It was quite dreadful,” he reflected,

I didn’t find it a picnic to be a photographer, through the Sixties, not because photography was disregarded, although of course that was true, but because my predicament was that of a committed illusionist in an environment that was officially dedicated to the eradication of illusion.²²

As well as hinting at the subaltern position of photography *vis à vis* the other arts, Frampton’s notion of a “remastering” of distressing past events, in order to take cognizance and some kind of control over them, resonates with Franz Kafka’s reflection on the apotropaic function of photography itself. For Kafka, in fact, quoted

¹⁹ MacDonald, “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” 159.

²⁰ Ibid., 160.

²¹ Ibid., 160. George Landow is now known as Owen Land.

by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, “we photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds.”²³ If the photograph is presented as a “form of exorcism,” its power to rid us of an obsession, a trauma, is, paradoxically, predicated on a form of repetition: the thing in our minds is in a way re-produced in the image.²⁴ *nostalgia* redoubles this account. Through the filming of the stills, that is, the very act of repetition, of re-production of a mental image which the photograph may be seen to embody is, in its turn, repeated. Indeed, Frampton’s allusion to the fact that he can return to the prints by “rewinding the film” may be seen to lay further emphasis on it as a process of “working through” of trauma by repetition.²⁵ Yet, what interests me here is the “remastering” of the photographic images themselves, in the sense in which a “master” is used to produce copies. Destroyed, yet preserved in a *different* form, they are translated from one representational technology into another. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have termed this recycling between media “remediation.”²⁶ In this specific context, “remediation” – or, to use Frampton’s term, “remastering” – points to a mapping onto each other of personal history and visual culture. On the one hand, it is symbolic of Frampton’s rhetorical – if not actual – liquidation of photography for cinema in the early 1970s: *nostalgia* itself ends with the artist’s off-screen voice (in fact played by Snow) vowing to “never dare to make another photograph again.”²⁷ On the other, as with Antonioni’s *L’amorosa*

²² Ibid., 159.

²³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* [1980], trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 53.

²⁴ Cf. George Baker “Reanimations (I)” [2002], *October* 104 (Spring 2003), 28-70. 40 cited.

²⁵ Cf. Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memories” [1899] and “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” [1914], *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), vol. 3 and vol. 12 respectively.

²⁶ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

²⁷ Though he lessened his photographic activity in the 1970s, Frampton never abandoned the medium altogether. *nostalgia* itself also appeared as a photographic portfolio in 1971, in which each of the prints featured in the film is accompanied by its commentary. The *nostalgia* portfolio is included in Jenkins and Krane, *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/ Recreation*, from where I quote page 69. Rachel

menzogna, it may be seen to refer to a process of demotion and banalization of photography in culture at large. I shall return to this at length later. Here, I want to focus on the formal aspects and implications of this passage of the photographic image from a “still” to a “moving” medium. For both photography *and* cinema are transformed by this “remediation.” Where cinema may become “uncinematic,” moving towards the stillness Adorno diagnosed in Antonioni’s films, photography, in its turn, becomes “unphotographic.”

“The current of frames through the projector,” Stanley Cavell remarked in *The World Viewed* (1971), “cannot be stilled (unless for analysis), so that the liveness of a motionless camera on a motionless subject remains altogether different in its significance from the stillness of a still depiction.”²⁸ Since cinema is made up of a series of single images in motion, the apparent stillness it may contain – a filmed still photograph, freeze frame, or static shot of a motionless pose or scene – is never quite immobility. While probably not as “lively” as Cavell would have it, a “cinematic photograph” is certainly different from an actual photograph in this respect: it is still, yet moving; its stillness is in motion. To a certain extent, this oxymoronic condition is a point of friction; a point where cinema’s inner stasis brushes against, and seemingly disrupts – if it does not interrupt – its manifest kinesis. As such, it at once echoes and recapitulates the very “tension between stillness and movement,” as Laura Mulvey has succinctly put it, that “is essential to cinema as a technology and as an illusion.”²⁹ Related to the fact that it is put “in

O. Moore, in *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), chapter 10, analyzes the historical and cultural implications of Frampton’s act of burning of the photographs in his “switch” to the cinematic medium.

²⁸ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [1971] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, enlarged edition 1979), 202.

²⁹ Mulvey, “Death 24 Times a Second,” unpaginated.

motion,” there is another, crucial, aspect of this “remediation” of photographic stillness within the cinematic.

“At the point where the cinematographic image most directly confronts the photo,” Deleuze argues in *Cinema II*, “it also becomes most radically distinct from it.” “[Yasujiro] Ozu’s still lifes,” he continues, “*endure*, have a duration, over ten seconds of the vase.”³⁰ Though Deleuze is here referring to the Japanese director’s static framings, rather than specifically to the filming of a still image, he is nevertheless presenting them as a moment in which the movies come head on with the photographic. In fact, the point he thus makes about stillness in the cinema having a duration is certainly true of a filmed photograph: a “*mise-en-film*” still *endures* for a pre-ordained amount of time.³¹ “Still,” as George Baker has noted in another context, “also means a continuation. ‘*Encore*’, as the French would say, signifying both repetition and prolongation.”³² *nostalgia* – of which Frampton spoke as a way, paradoxically, of preserving the destroyed photographs – epitomizes this cinematic “continuation” of the still. The still is “encored:” something that persists, and reappears – both within the film, as an object, a format, repeated a dozen times, and in its “resurrection” when the reel is replayed. The “instant” of the photographic is dragged out, and reiterated.

Snow’s by now classic *Wavelength* also vividly brings the paradox of the filmed still into relief. As, for the whole duration of the film’s forty-five minutes, the movie camera slowly zooms onto a photograph of the sea tacked to a wall at the opposite end of the room, a tension between stillness and movement is put in play

³⁰ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 17. My emphasis.

³¹ I take the expression “*mise-en-film*” from the aforementioned article by Phillippe Dubois, “Photography *Mise-en-Film*: Autobiographical (Hi)stories and Psychic Apparatuses.”

³² Baker “Reanimations (I),” 34. Baker’s article is on the films and slide-projections of James Coleman. He draws on Kaja Silverman’s essay “Growing Still,” in Susanne Gaensheimer, ed., *James*

both visually and formally. As the adjustment of the camera lens gradually enlarges the image of the far wall on which the photograph hangs, the rest of the room is progressively cut out of the frame: this static image becomes the film's fulcrum, its "still point," as Annette Michelson called it.³³ Conversely, though, this still by which the movie camera seems attracted, magnetized, is itself visibly caught within the movement of the film. By the end of the film, the photograph fills the screen completely. This view is sustained for the concluding minutes, as the camera lingers, scans and zooms further into the picture's grainy surface. This probing even suggests the idea that, at the same time as the movie camera, as in *nostalgia*, is making the still endure, continue, it is also, in a way, trying to draw the time of stillness *out of* the photograph as such.

Snow, who said that with *Wavelength* he "was thinking of, planning for, a time monument," similarly endowed photography with duration in the slightly later *One Second in Montreal*.³⁴ In this film, not one, but a series of stills are protractedly held on the screen. Unlike in *Wavelength*, here the camera is rather inert, simply "holding" the stills with a static shot that neither zooms into, nor scans their surface. Similarly to Frampton's film, the photographs appear in succession, one after the other. However, they are rather – as in Marker's *La Jetée* – what the film is *made of*, so to speak, than, as in *nostalgia*, an element *within* it, the very *subject* of the film. On the one hand, the fixity of the camera and the static nature of the stills themselves are as if reinforced by the (in some respect literal) "frozen" quality of the depicted imagery. Though, as the title intimates, this consists of photos (or, as the "one second" may suggest, rapidly composed snapshots) of Montreal, the images do not

Coleman (Monaco: Hatje Cant, 2002), which reflects on the double use of the word "still" in one of Coleman's works.

³³ Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow," *Artforum* 9 (June 1971), 30-34. 32 cited.

show the characteristic landmarks of the city, but, rather, its anonymous and liminal spaces: crossroads, green expanses, parks. Covered in snow and deserted, even desolate, this is an urban landscape, which, but for some sporadic car, is eerily devoid of people, or more, generally, “life.” On the other hand, this very stillness is embedded within cinematic movement. Indeed, the length of the cinematic “exposure” of the photographs, which varies throughout the film, contributes to bring into relief both the fact that they are “set in motion” by the cinema and that they are turned into durational objects. The stills’ pattern of appearance on screen, in fact, describes an ascending curve in the first part, in which each picture is held for slightly longer than the preceding one, and a descending one in the second part, where the opposite happens. Thus, as in *nostalgia*, the very idea of an “enduring” still is, in its turn, “encored,” reiterated – with variations – for the duration of the film itself. Apart from the very last few images, which are fired relatively rapidly, the overall rhythm is ponderous. “Remediated” in the cinema, these photos of Montreal largely outlast the “one second” alluded to in the title. “Shown for much longer than it took to expose the [photographic] camera,” as Malcolm Le Grice has pointed out, each photograph’s screening time is thus “an extreme extension of the ‘shooting’ time.”³⁵ Indeed, the prolonged duration of their cinematic incarnation generates a contrast with the instantaneousness which both the film’s very title and their “snapshot aesthetics” seem to invoke.

An even stronger tension of this kind originates in *Blow-up*, probably still the best known example of a film *about* still photography, and one in which still photographs – or, more precisely, snapshots – play a prominent part. Released in 1966, Antonioni’s film slightly precedes Snow’s and Frampton’s (in fact, in the case

³⁴ Snow’s description of his film for the 1967 International Experimental Film Festival of Knokke-le-

of *Wavelength*, by less than one year). And whilst my argument is not about “influence,” the fact that *Blow-up*’s reflection on the photographic image addressed a wider concern within the period – and also, more specifically, the relation between photography and cinema –, must have certainly been a factor in its immediate success and resonance among artists and filmmakers.³⁶

In the park, David Hemmings’s character – Thomas, the disenchanted fashion photographer styled on David Bailey – is oddly interested in what seems, at all effects, a “non-event”: the inconspicuous ordinariness of a flirting couple in a setting just as banal.³⁷ He captures this scene with an extensive series of snapshots, rapidly clicking away at his camera, swiftly (and almost acrobatically) running here and there to frame different viewpoints. Indeed, the speed and energy employed appear excessive *vis à vis* the ostensible banality of the situation. When, developed and printed by Thomas, these snapshots are then introduced in the film, the very rapidity, the instantaneousness of their making, engenders a stark contrast with their prolonged presence on screen. As in Frampton’s and Snow’s films, the movie camera lingers over the photographs, so that the *mise-en-film* stills outlast the time taken to generate them as images. The “instant” captured by the photographic is extended, dilated, drawn out into duration.

Famously, trying to describe – and categorize – what he saw as the new self-reflexive tendency of experimental filmmaking in the late 1960s, P. Adams Sitney

Zoute, quoted by Michelson, “Toward Snow,” 31.

³⁵ Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1977), 120.

³⁶ *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film* (2) (1968), by the American experimental filmmaker and conceptual artist Morgan Fisher, for example, is strongly evocative of *Blow-up*. Similarly to *Blow-up*, Fisher’s self-reflexive meditation revolves around the idea of (re)constructing a story, an event, out of still photographs documenting it. Unlike *Blow-up*, the event to be pieced together is the process of making the film itself. Fisher also made *Production Stills* (1970), another film about “its own making,” centred on the prolonged filming of Polaroids taken during production.

³⁷ Though he is seemingly not named in the film, the photographer is identified as “Thomas” in the script. Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-up: A Film* [1966] (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1971).

described the work of Snow and Frampton, among others, as “a cinema of structure.” “The aesthetic crux of the structural film,” he wrote in his landmark essay of 1969, is “the principle of elongation rather than condensation.”³⁸ According to Sitney, the “elongation” at issue in the structural film can be aligned with the logic of estrangement championed by the Russian formalist school. More precisely, Sitney quotes from Victor Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique” (1917), in which it is argued that “the technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’” by producing a “slowness of perception.”³⁹ Not only in the “structural” films of Snow and Frampton but, also, in *Blow-up*, the “principle of elongation” thus outlined by Sitney operates within the temporal dilation of the stills. In *Blow-up*, Thomas’s snapshots are in black and white. Registered by the colour film, this quality already somewhat “defamiliarizes” the photos from the very scene in the park from which, plot-wise, they derive. But, in fact, it is the protracted look of the movie camera (with the “slowness of perception” this enforces on the viewer) that marks out and *constructs* as “arresting” the banality of their imagery – also, indeed, by drawing out and emphasizing the colour contrast with the rest of the film. Through cinematic “persistence,” the momentariness of these images is endowed with the weight of the momentous, the ordinariness of the “non-event” they denote is qualified as extraordinary – and this even before, via the enlargements, an actual “extraordinary” event is disclosed within their very ordinariness.

Even a static camera on a static subject possesses, as Cavell put it, a certain “liveness,” since it is, so to speak, “animated” by its own mechanical movement. In this instance, furthermore, while, at a figurative level, the camera “pauses” on the stills, it does not actually stop on the images with a static shot but, rather, zooms in

³⁸ P. Adams Sitney, “Structural Film” [1969], in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* [1970],

and out of them, scans across their surfaces, pans from one to the other. The film, we could say, is not so much “stilled,” as Bellour suggested, by this emergence of the photographic image, as *slowed down*.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, the “condensed” time that the stills themselves – as captured instants, representative moments of a more extensive event – can be seen to embody, is here precisely that which “elongates” the cinematic time.

Opening up this oxymoronic moment of “moving” stillness within the film, the photographs, in more than one sense, are *Blow-up*’s kernel. They are not only its narrative core (around which Thomas’s quest revolves), but, also, a core that can be seen to allude, self-reflexively, to the photographic root of the cinema itself. This is further evoked by the way in which Thomas displays the photographs in his studio. The woman’s distress at having being photographed (she has even, in vain, turned up at his studio, hoping to recover the roll in exchange for sexual favours), has further fuelled Thomas’s interest in what he has seen in the park. Trying to reconstruct *and* analyse the earlier episode, he pins his snapshots along the walls of his studio. This very soon leads him to enlarge some of the images and, even, to enlarge the enlargements, or re-photograph some details of them (ills. 13 and 14, pp. 341–42). Indeed, this process of “dilating” the instant captured by the photographic by excavating it, so to speak, spatially, will eventually reveal the uncanny *within* the banal as, in the abstract graininess of these extreme blow-ups, Thomas will discern a killer and a corpse. The horizontal succession he arranges along his walls – in which the duration and the dynamics of the scene are indexed through a series of still

(New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 335.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Bellour, “The Film Stilled.”

moments – recalls, Seymour Chatman has suggested, “a kind of storyboard.”⁴¹ Conceptually, a storyboard is not dissimilar from a *fotoromanzo*, which, as we have seen, had captured Antonioni’s attention early on in his career. With the *fotoromanzo*, the reader reconstructs narrative dynamics – the “movement” of narrative itself – out of representative still points, what Lessing, as Barthes reminded us, would have called “pregnant moments.”⁴² A cognate principle is at work in the storyboard, which, prior to the realization of the film as such, functions as its presentation “in a nutshell,” an embodiment of its minimal, yet essential, structure as a series of still images and captions. But where a storyboard usually consists of drawn sketches, a “photo-novel” is, by definition, made of photographs. Crucially, in *Blow-up*, Thomas’s display is photographic, rendering his *a posteriori* “storyboard” even more reminiscent of the *fotoromanzo*. While *L’amorosa menzogna* and *The White Sheik* presented the “photonovel” as, culturally speaking, the “underside” of the movies, they nonetheless suggested the idea that its very medium and format embodied cinema “cut to the bone”: reduced to bare essentials, *and*, in a way, stripped bare. Thus if Thomas’s arrangement of his snapshots is a bit like a storyboard, this also invokes photography as the very embryo and backbone of the cinema. “Extracted,” as it were, from a sequence of the film itself (that of the episode in the park), the photos almost appear as its hidden skeleton, revealed. Placed one next to the other with almost no gaps between them, the stills, thus aligned, are also reminiscent of the filmstrip, therefore calling into play the photographic usually “concealed” within – or, as Baudry argued, “repressed” by – the cinematic as such.⁴³

⁴¹ Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or the Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 149.

⁴² Roland Barthes, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein” [1973], in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 73. Cf. Victor Burgin, “Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo,” in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986).

⁴³ Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus.”

One After the Other: Photography, Seriality, Reproducibility

What the *fotoromanzo* and the filmstrip share is not simply a photographic basis, but, more precisely, the way in which this basis is articulated. For, in fact, serialization is at the heart of both. This serialization is spatial in the first instance, as images are laid one next to the other. However, it also corresponds to a temporal sequence: indeed, it is “converted” into a succession in time by either the reader or the projector. In its cinematic incarnation of the *fotoromanzo* and the filmstrip, *Blow-up* visualizes this translation from “next to” to “after.” As the camera zooms and ponders on each individual still consecutively, Thomas’s spatial display is *also* a temporal series in the film – and a dilated one at that.

As we have seen, this temporal prolongation of not just one photograph but many photographs, is also at work in *nostalgia*. And, indeed, something of *Blow-up* permeates *nostalgia*. In Frampton’s film, too, the photos are resonant of a hybrid between the storyboard and the *fotoromanzo*. As, in Antonioni’s film, Thomas uses the stills to (re)construct the episode in the park, so, in *nostalgia*, Frampton’s pseudo-autobiography is (re)composed through the photographs, as a springboard, a visual aid, for the narrated anecdotes. But whereas the episode in the park is reconstructed, via the enlargements, as much “more” of a story than one would initially expect (the murder Thomas may have witnessed), in *nostalgia*, the “story” – however fictionalized – of Frampton’s life, is hardly there at all. What we have, rather, is a succession of isolated vignettes, just as a disparate number of photos is connected together as “a series” by being thus arranged in the film. As in *Blow-up*, but more emphatically and extremely, the succinctness of the still is stretched out.

The photographic instant is elongated and repeated, to the point that the whole of the film's time is woven upon and with it. As each shot lingers meditatively on the print's burnt remains, we could furthermore say that film time is here, quite literally, also built with the "ashes" of photographic time – as if cinematic duration were at the same time an expiration and a dragging out of the instant of photography.

Cinema itself, in a way, is presented as a serialization and an extension of the photographic and its time. This elasticization of photographic time is enhanced by the "out of synch" effect between the images and the soundtrack in the film, whereby the commentary pertaining to each of the photos relates to the image yet to come. By engendering a sense of disjunction and of delay/anticipation between the still visible on screen and the one being verbally described, this further extends the "moment" of the photographic. The instant of exposure indexically captured by the photograph is as if confused – problematized – by the voiceover narration and its reliance on another nuance of indexicality, that of what Roman Jakobson called "shifters" – words such as "this" and "here." "The voice describes 'this photograph,' as Mulvey has recently noted, "but it is not 'this' one seen by the spectator."⁴⁴ Yet, while "confusing" the photographic index and its instant, the narrator's very use of "this" and "here" also "stretches" them into both the past and the future. And, indeed, we are "stretched" too, as our faculties – memory, attention, imagination – are, so to speak, "divided," or made to move "back and forth," between what we have heard and what we see, and what we hear and what we will see.

But the most obvious resonance of Antonioni's film is in *nostalgia's* concluding sketch, in which, echoing Thomas's adventure, *Blow-up* is invoked in all but name. The narrator recounts how, though having "largely given up still

photography,” he had recently felt compelled to obey an “obtrusive need” to “take my camera out of doors” again.⁴⁵ On the occasion, however, he explains, he made only one photograph, its composition furthermore spoiled by a truck getting in the way. On printing the negative though, “something” – “only a tiny detail,” “reflected in a factory window, and then reflected once more in the rear-view mirror attached to the truck door” – caught his attention:

Since then, I have enlarged this small section of my negative enormously. The grain of the film all but obliterates the features of the image. It is obscure; by any possible reckoning, it is hopelessly ambiguous. Nevertheless, what I believe I see recorded, in that speck of film, fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph again.⁴⁶

The allusion to Thomas’s blow-ups of his park snapshots, and the mystery concealed/revealed there, is quite evident. As in Frampton’s anecdote, Thomas’s series of enlargements – and furthermore, enlargements *of* enlargements– end up, paradoxically, dissolving the image. The attempt to “magnify” photographic evidence, to get to the core of the “real” captured by the camera, destroys that very evidence. Yet, though the image may be lost, what is maintained, and *multiplied* in this process is the photograph itself. In both *Blow-up* and *nostalgia* the concept of the blow-up further emphasizes the seriality of the photographic. If the physical serialization of the photographs crystallizes their “repeatability” (their standardized

⁴⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 X a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 189.

⁴⁵ Jenkins and Krane, *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/ Recreations*, 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

dimensions; the characteristic consistency of photographic paper, etc.), the notion of the enlargement evokes their reproducibility. Even Frampton's only and "ultimate" picture is, as it were, in the plural: it is made "many" by a succession of blow-ups. As the image gives way to the grain of the medium, the reproducibility of the format itself – the potential seriality of even a single photograph – is brought into relief.

This "remediation" of photography, and its seriality, in the moving image is certainly indicative of cinema's intensive self-reflexive inquiry during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet, this emergence is also, at the same time, symptomatic of the very conditions of visibility – and, even, experience more generally – engendered by the mass diffusion of these representational technologies themselves. No one would dispute that photography and cinema have transformed our very modes of seeing, and expanded enormously the realm of the visible. As Benjamin argued, photography and cinema have dramatically re-trained the human eye: the former by making it more sensitive to the "moment," and to the detail within it, the latter by accustoming it to the visual speed of modern life.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as *Blow-up* and *nostalgia* suggest, the domain of the visible is augmented by what the naked eye fails to notice (Benjamin's "optical unconscious"⁴⁸), and broadened – as the photos of Africa in *L'eclisse* show – by the evidence of "different" cultural and geographical realities. In short, by extending the range of what is brought to light and represented, photography and cinema inserted much that had previously been "invisible" into the realm of visibility.

But, precisely by so doing, these media rendered the hitherto invisible, commonplace, banal, or even *boring*. For the very principles on which photography

⁴⁷ E.g. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1936], in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999).

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography" [1931], in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2000), 243.

and cinema are based – reproducibility and seriality – inevitably extended to the objects being represented. So, whilst *nostalgia*'s anecdotes may aim to highlight the “interesting” in Frampton's photographs, their forcedly deadpan, monotone delivery undermines this. If the “dull sentences” and the “repetitive forms” of the narration, together with the slow pace of the film, bore *us*, they also suggest Frampton's *own* boredom with his photographs – boredom, we may infer, he tried to avert by doing something “different” with them, if not, in fact, by switching to cinema.⁴⁹ And, by going back to *L'eclisse*, and the women's engagement with photography with which I started, it is to boredom itself that I now turn.

Boredom

As early as 1916, the imbrication of boredom and visuality in a photographic age was already a hard fact for Marcel Proust. For the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time*, Venice's unique charm and beauty was sullied and dulled by the mere *thought* – let alone the actual sight – of the photograph or, more precisely, its plurality:

⁴⁹ Moore, *Savage Theory*, 146. Moore links *nostalgia*'s humdrum narration to Julia Kristeva's characterization of melancholic speech as “repetitive” and “monotonous.” It is here that she suggests that “[t]he dull, declarative sentences, the repetitive forms bore you, while the threat of ‘cognitive chaos’ build towards fatigue” from where I quote. Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). There are certainly affinities and overlaps between depression and boredom. Otto Fenichel, whom I shall discuss later, pointed this out in the first psychoanalytical paper dedicated to boredom.

I tried next to draw from my memory other “snapshots,” those in particular which it had taken in Venice, but the mere word “snapshot” made Venice seem to me as boring as an exhibition of photographs...⁵⁰

Proust’s denigration of the snapshot highlights a triangulation between the exponential diffusion of representational technologies, the expansion of the category of the everyday, and the propagation of boredom in modernity.⁵¹ A few decades later, this triangulation was recapitulated, and spelled out more overtly, by Maurice Blanchot, for whom “boredom” is nothing less than “the everyday become manifest: as a consequence of having lost its essential – constitutive – trait of being *unperceived*.”⁵² What makes the everyday manifest, perceivable (though mostly by transfiguring it into something allegedly “sensational”⁵³) are precisely the technologies of representation developed within modernity. The reason for this lies not only in the fact that mass media such as photography (“mobile, immobile”) and television constitute the means through which, as Blanchot suggests, the quotidian

⁵⁰ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* [1913-1927], 6 vols., vol. 6: *Time Regained* [written c.1916], trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage, 2000), 215. I owe this reference to Elena Gualtieri, “Bored by Photographs: Proust in Venice,” in David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher, Sas Mays, eds., *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005). Drawing on Bergson, Gualtieri discusses how Proust’s understanding of perception and memory is deeply linked to photography and, more specifically, the snapshot. For Proust, she argues, voluntary memory is homologous to the photograph, the snapshot. Meanwhile, however, the past Proust seeks to recover exceeds both – hence his boredom and frustration with the photograph and voluntary memory alike, which only preserve clichéd and “dead” images of the past.

⁵¹ Cf. John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). For Roberts, the parallel development of photography and cinema on one side, and psychoanalysis on the other, constitutes the joint factor for the expansion, in both depth and extension, of the category of the “everyday” in the twentieth century. Where cinema and photography augment the visibility and reproduction of ordinary objects and activities, psychoanalysis endows the prosaic with a whole new depth, by placing emphasis on its hidden significance.

⁵² Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech” [1959], trans. Susan Hanson, *Yale French Studies* 73, *Everyday Life* (1987), 12-20. 16 cited.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

finds “exposition,” but also, in the fact that these technologies *themselves* have become an integral part of our daily life.⁵⁴

Novelty, and the Epidemic of Monotony

“Boredom,” as Lars Svendsen has recently noted, “has only been a central cultural phenomenon for a couple of centuries.”⁵⁵ Its history, in fact, is not only inextricably linked with, but also defined in relation to, the experience of modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the Middle Ages, *accidia*, *tedium vitae* and melancholy, among other terms, had indicated a sense of spiritual dejection ensuing from the isolation of religious or scholarly life. In contrast to these terms’ association with a contemplative existence, during the past two centuries, expressions denoting a rather mundane feeling of dreariness, produced by the drudgery of the quotidian, emerged and developed across Western languages. In this respect, the development of the concept in the English language is perhaps the most exemplary, as the word itself emerges within this very time-span. Originating in the mid- and late-eighteenth-century terms “to bore,” or “a bore,” the word “boredom,” in fact, was first used (if not coined) in 1852 by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*, where it is described as a “chronic malady,” a “weariness of soul.”⁵⁶ In French, meanwhile, Gustave Flaubert felt the need to qualify the existing French word “*ennui*” with the adjective “*moderne*,” in order to specify the gravity of the new condition, whilst Charles Baudelaire chose to adopt the English “spleen.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Alberto

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 11.

⁵⁶ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* [1852] (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), 324 and 128 respectively.

⁵⁷ Gustave Flaubert, “Letter to Louis de Cormerin, 7 June 1844,” quoted by Seán Desmond Healy, *Boredom: Self and Culture* (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), 28. For a history of

Moravia, though using “*noia*” (the Italian for boredom, which, like the French *ennui*, is of medieval origin, from the Latin *in odium* = “in hatred”) in his 1960 novel of the same title, differentiated between its “ordinary,” older form, and its contemporary manifestation. Whereas the former, contingent on a specific circumstance or person, is considered a passing and “solvable” situation, the latter is described as an insurmountable state of mind.⁵⁸ Yet, for all this emphasis on the soul and the mind, the crux of the problem is felt to lie precisely in the fact that the condition is not, essentially, a matter of interiority but, rather, something objectively attributable to the external world, and to the *modern* world more precisely. For the narrator of Georges Bernanos’s *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1936), boredom is “like dust”: it slowly settles “coating your face and hands,” and “you breathe it in,” “eat” it, “drink” it.⁵⁹

Though they wrote about modernity in terms of “shock,” both Kracauer and Benjamin also addressed the problem of boredom within it. Indeed, together with Georg Simmel, Otto Fenichel and Martin Heidegger, they were among the first to analyse and expound a theory of the phenomenon as a specifically modern category. Though coming to it from different perspectives, they all agreed that it was both a social and a psychic phenomenon, whose roots were in the technological, economic and cultural processes of modernization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their analyses are in fact eminently tied to large urban realities, seen as focal centres of such processes. It is these multiple aspects of modernization, epitomized by the

boredom, see also: Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁵⁸ Alberto Moravia, *La noia* (Milano: Bombiani, 1960), 14–16. Initially published in English under the title *The Empty Canvas*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), the novel has more recently been re-published under the titled *Boredom*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: New York Review of Books, 1999).

⁵⁹ Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest* [1936], trans. Pamela Morris (London: Boriswood, 1937), 10.

metropolis, centre of cutting-edge innovations and huge anonymous crowds at both labour and leisure, which are the prerequisites of boredom. Though the “new” at first can provoke shock, it can also quickly generate indifference and apathy as a reaction formation. “There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon,” Simmel suggests in his essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” “which has been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as the blasé outlook.”⁶⁰

Exhausted by excessive sensory stimulation, by the constant perceptual assault of the new, the city dweller soon turns blasé, copes with the urban spectacle through a state of bored indifference and distracted perception. In a passage that chimes with Vittoria’s description of her tired indifference, when, in her words, “to have in your hands a needle, a piece of cloth, a book, a man is the same thing,” Simmel goes on to argue:

The essence of the blasé attitude consists in the blunting of discrimination. This does not mean that the objects are not perceived [...] but rather that the meaning and differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial. They appear to the blasé person in an evenly flat and grey tone; no one object deserves preference over any other.⁶¹

This “blunting of discrimination” and general apathy towards the external world are precisely what, in Moravia’s *Boredom*, summarizes the narrator’s condition, explained as “a lack of relationship with external objects,” in which things “wither away.”⁶² In Simmel’s view, this indifference to things is at once the product and the

⁶⁰ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” [1903], in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 413.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁶² Moravia, *La noia*, 9.

replication, the “subjective reflection,” of the homogenization and serialization of things that “the ‘money economy’ introduces.”⁶³ This connection further resonates with the three women’s boredom in *L’eclisse*, rooted in, and symptomatic of, the levelling and standardizing effects of the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, the transformations in Italy during those decades were all the more intense and radical for being largely unprecedented, as the country had until then lagged behind the pace of industrialization and modernization prevailing in northern Europe and the USA. With an expression conveying some of the astonishing impact of such changes on the Italian reality, the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s is commonly referred to as “the economic miracle.” During those years the middle-classes swelled incrementally, a consumer society emerged and rapidly developed, the emancipation of women (who had gained the vote for the first time only in 1946), although gradual, began to leave its mark on societal structure and relations.⁶⁴

Simmel’s comments point to how, within modernity, boredom itself can only emerge when the “new” generated by it begins to turn ordinary; when, that is, the various forms of novelty associated with modernization gradually become standard and routine, and are progressively incorporated into the everyday. “Monotony,” Benjamin writes in the “Boredom, Eternal Return” *convolute* of his unfinished *The Arcades Project*, “feeds on the new”; it is when the new itself passes into a monotony of both production and reception that boredom, in its turn, finds a breeding ground.⁶⁵ For Patrice Petro, this idea is condensed in the concept of “after

⁶³ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 414.

⁶⁴ For discussions of Antonioni’s film in the context of the country’s economic boom, see P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) and Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). An earlier film by Antonioni dealing specifically with women’s increasing social mobility in the postwar period, and a related “crisis of masculinity,” is *Le amiche* (*The Girlfriends*, 1955).

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [1927-1940], trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), 111.

shock,” which she identifies as, within modernity, an intermediary zone after the initial impact of the new. “[A]fter shock retains an element of shock, but nonetheless signals the fading of its initial intensity. Not unlike the term *afterimage*,” Petro explains, “it invokes an impression, or experience, or affect that persists long after an image or stimulus has passed from view.”⁶⁶ As such, “after shock” designates

a moment when the new ceases to be shocking, when leisure as well as labour time becomes routinized, fetishized, commodified, and when the extraordinary, the unusual, and the unfamiliar are inextricably linked to the boring, the prosaic, the everyday.⁶⁷

Directly related to the standardizing and routinizing aspects of modernization, another facet of boredom to which both Kracauer and Benjamin give prominence is its “collective” dimension. In the *Arcades*, Benjamin often looks at contemporary Paris through the lens of the previous century. Despite mostly basing his account of the phenomenon around fin-de-siècle déclassé or bourgeois (male) figures, such as the *flâneur*, the gambler, and the dandy, he still sets it forth as a collective rather than an individual experience. He points to its “epidemic proportions,” characterizing it as the “index to participation in the sleep of the collective.”⁶⁸ Kracauer, with his more specific focus on the twentieth century, and on the leisure and labour time of the urban working masses, accentuates even further this shared and participatory aspect of boredom. For both, marking the individual’s involvement in collective alienation, boredom ironically comes to stand as “the”

⁶⁶ Patrice Petro “After Shock/ Between Boredom and History,” in Patrice Petro, ed., *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 265.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 108.

democratic and democratizing by-product of a capitalist system. Blanchot, paraphrasing Friedrich Schlegel, once compared boredom to the accumulation of carbon dioxide “in a closed space when too many people find themselves together there.”⁶⁹ As well as evoking the idea that the individual is both actively *and* passively involved in boredom – something, like carbon dioxide, to which one is subjected, while, at the same time, producing it – this claustrophobic image also crystallizes its communal and levelling dimension. In principle, boredom can affect all classes, and both sexes. Gendering the condition in the feminine, *L’eclisse* gives particular prominence to this “epidemic” and “demotic” aspect of boredom, simultaneously highlighting both its possibilities and its limits for women. With its three women awake at night, still moving when they should be still, the film encapsulates how boredom is in fact also the index of a new social mobility, of gender as well as class – Marta and Anita are comfortably-off housewives, Vittoria a professional translator. Yet, the very situation through which boredom unfolds in this scene, in the enclosed space of their apartments, and via the oppression of being awake at the “wrong” time, also evokes the image of its stifling and paralyzing accumulation sketched by Blanchot and Schlegel. So, in fact, at the same time as it signals their increased “freedom,” the women’s boredom – manifested here in their nocturnal wakefulness and restlessness – is also a form of estrangement from the greater mobility of men, and from their time. Notably, one husband is away on business; the other, in view of the next day’s work as a pilot, is using his night-time “productively,” to sleep.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Blanchot, “Everyday Speech,” 16.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of boredom in terms of gender, and as a feminist question, see: Patrice Petro, ‘Historical *ennui*, Feminist Boredom’, in Vivian Schobank, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

From both Benjamin's and Kracauer's writings, boredom emerges as essentially a problem of time in modernity, and of what to do with it. Through the types of the gambler, the *flâneur*, and "he who waits," Benjamin describes different strategies "to pass the time": one can "kill/expel" time, "store" it, or "wait" it through ("take time in and render it up in altered form – that of expectation").⁷¹ Fenichel very effectively makes boredom's intrinsic link to time explicit by pointing to how, in German, the very word for the condition expresses this relation. *Langeweile*, literally "long while," he suggests, "indicates that in this state there are always changes in the person's subjective experience of time."⁷² Fenichel offers the example of "'Sunday neurotics,' whose symptom is merely that on Sundays, or during vacations, they *are bored*." For these people, when time is not regimented, boredom creeps up: on Sundays, "the 'while is long.'"⁷³ As an apparent defence against this "long while," Kracauer underlines the regimentation of leisure time itself in the big city, which actually comes to constitute a replication of Taylorized labour time rather than an alternative respite from it.⁷⁴ "The form of free time busy-ness," strategies to while the hours away, Kracauer writes in "The Cult of Distraction," "corresponds to the form of business."⁷⁵ By arguing that "boredom springs from the temporality of *Dasein*," from the very time, that is, of situated being, Heidegger

⁷¹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 107.

⁷² Otto Fenichel, "On the Psychology of Boredom" [1934], *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, ed. Hanna Fenichel and David Rapaport (London: Routledge, 1954), 301.

⁷³ Ibid., 300 and 301. Fenichel is drawing here on an earlier paper by Sándor Ferenczi, "Sunday Neurosis" (1919), who had first drawn attention to the phenomenon. Ferenczi's paper can be found in John Rickman, ed., *Further Contributions to the Theory and Technique of Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926).

⁷⁴ See: Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. 38-44, where he juxtaposes *ennui* (as a melancholic or depressed state typical of the leisure classes) to "fatigue" (as a physical and mental condition linked to mechanization and Taylorization).

⁷⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, "The Cult of Distraction" [1926], *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 325.

similarly relates the condition to the routinization of time in modernity.⁷⁶ Like Kracauer, he suggests that the attempts to escape its “dullness” actually often end up mirroring its very structure, so that the ways by which the subject seeks evasion from the rigidly systematized “everydayness” in which it feels to be “sink[ing] away,” amount to a “dispersion” in which being is “further dispersed.”⁷⁷

Distraction is an almost ubiquitous term in theories of boredom. Distraction could describe the form of sensory reception at play in Simmel’s “blasé attitude,” involving a muffling of perception and a lowering of attention, a tired indifference and a habituation to the excessive stimuli of metropolitan life. Of this type is the aboulia of Dino, the protagonist of Moravia’s *Boredom*, of the women in *L’eclisse*, and, also, of Thomas in *Blow-up*, who, though immersed in the “swinging” London of the 1960s, admits to having “gone off” it: “it doesn’t do anything for me,” he says. But, in addition to denoting a mode of perception – or even, as Heidegger puts it, “a pallid lack of mood”⁷⁸ – distraction can indicate entertainment. And both these conceptions, as is suggested in Moravia’s novel, can be present and can indeed coexist in boredom:

For many people boredom is the opposite of amusement; and amusement means distraction, forgetfulness. For me, on the contrary, boredom is not the opposite of amusement; I might even go so far as to say that in certain of its

⁷⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* [1953], trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 127.

⁷⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927], trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 422. See also Theodor W. Adorno, “Free Time” [1969], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1993), in which Adorno argues that “‘free time’ tends towards its own [apparent] opposite,” labour time, and is, effectively, a “compulsory” form of “organized freedom” (163 and 165).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

aspects it actually resembles amusement inasmuch as it in fact gives rise to distraction and forgetfulness, even if of a very special type.⁷⁹

So, for example, Thomas's boredom in *Blow-up* is manifested by his "blasé attitude" towards the glamour of London, but, also, by the fact that he is, continuously, distracted by distractions of various kind. His "murder investigation" is, again and again, interrupted by forms of entertainment – including organized, public spectacle – that not only, rather literally, "hold" him from his proposed line of action but that, actually, make him temporarily oblivious to it. Many have highlighted *Blow-up*'s centrifugal narrative, in which, as Chatman has put it, "distractions interrupt distractions."⁸⁰ So, for example, when Thomas is studying his enlargements, he is interrupted by two models that perform, and engage him in, a scene of quasi-sexual frolics in front of the coloured paper-screens in his studio – a sort of set in which he becomes himself a performer. Or, having apparently caught sight of the woman from the park, he begins by following her, but is soon side-tracked by a Yardbirds concert in which he becomes engrossed, even fighting to obtain a piece of smashed guitar (a piece that, however, he discards once out of the club). Indeed, the investigation *itself* originates as, and constitutes, one of Thomas's distractions. For it is in order to kill time that he visits the park in the first place and thus becomes the unwitting witness of a murder. And, subsequently, his investigation of the event is just an attempt to find some diversion from a job and lifestyle that, whilst "glamorous," have become immensely tedious to him.

⁷⁹ Moravia, *La noia*, 7.

⁸⁰ Chatman, *Antonioni, or The Surface of the World*, 140. See also: Sam Rohdie, *Antonioni* (London: BFI, 1990), 178 and Giorgio Tinazzi, "The Gaze and the Story," in Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (New York: Marsilio, 1996), xxii.

Kracauer, notably, focused on the notion of distraction as amusement, entertainment, “spectacle” in his essays of the 1920s and 1930s on the markedly urban proliferation of the new leisure industries. Outstanding among them were Berlin’s huge movie houses, “optical fairylands,” he notes, which it “would be disrespectful” to call anything less than “palaces of distraction.”⁸¹ Superficially, this metropolitan “addiction to distraction” may look like an antidote to, or a defence against boredom.⁸² Yet, while leisure and entertainment should provide relief from the stressful yet unfulfilling monotony of labour, these distractions, Kracauer argues, are actually a form of boredom itself. For Fenichel, “Sunday neurosis” is nothing more than a “hitherto latent boredom become[s] manifest” through lack of “diversion.”⁸³ Conversely, in Kracauer’s analysis – and as is surmised by the protagonist of Moravia’s novel – distraction itself can in turn also function as the very demonstration of boredom. On the one hand, modern forms of mass entertainment, providing diversions with which to fill the emptiness of free time, may serve to perpetuate the latency of boredom, to keep it “unconscious” of itself. On the other hand as, moreover, they replicate the standardized and rationalized “form of business,” they are also set to become as everyday and monotonous, and hence as *boring*, as the technological, economic and social transformations with which they are contemporaneous and from which they derive. So, in fact, the same blasé attitude that the city dweller has developed in response to the urban spectacle at large, may also be adopted for the spectacle of entertainment. “At the movies,” for example, Benjamin observes, “the public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.” “Reception in a state of distraction,” he explains, actually enthusiastic about the enfranchising aspects of such a mode of consumption, “finds in the film its true

⁸¹ Kracauer, “The Cult of Distraction,” 323.

means of exercise,” both in spite *and* because of its initial “shock effect,” like that earlier generated by photography.⁸⁴

Let us recall, here, once again, the three women in *L’eclisse*. Is their engagement with the photographic stills a distraction *from*, or rather, as Kracauer would argue, a *form of* the very boredom from which they suffer? To answer this, we must turn, once again, to consider photography itself.

The Photographic Face of Modernity

As well as writing about boredom, Benjamin and Kracauer were also, as is widely known, keenly interested in photography. On the one hand, as I mentioned earlier, Benjamin talked of photography, similarly to the way he described cinema, in terms of shock. “The photograph,” he famously wrote, “gave the moment a posthumous shock.”⁸⁵ As it “fix[es] an event,”⁸⁶ a photograph also captures “the tiny spark of contingency”; through slow motion and enlargement, it can further reveal what usually escapes the human eye.⁸⁷ Yet, for Benjamin, the genuinely revolutionary aspect of photography lies in the fact that, thanks to its reproducibility and expansion as a mass medium, its “shocks” and optical secrets have largely become part of the everyday and are available to all.

If Benjamin appears more enthusiastic about the emancipatory promises of the medium, Kracauer, whilst not negating the possibility of a redemptive function, takes a bleaker view of its mass diffusion, more clearly implicating photography in

⁸² Ibid., 325.

⁸³ Fenichel, “On the Psychology of Boredom,” 300.

⁸⁴ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 233-34.

⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire” [1939], in *Illuminations*, 171.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Benjamin, “A Small History of Photography,” 243.

boredom. “The blizzard of photographs,” he argues, with echoes of Simmel’s idea of the blasé, “betrays an indifference toward what the things mean.”⁸⁸ As the over-abundance and universal availability of photography encapsulates its ordinariness, it also recapitulates the collectivization of boredom that Kracauer describes through the category of “distraction.” It is no mere chance that his essay entitled “Photography” should start with the description of the photo of a film diva on the cover of an illustrated magazine. The medium, through its diffusion in press and advertising, is considered by Kracauer in relation to, and in collusion with, other forms of mass entertainment, including cinema. As the sheer number of photographs contributes to the diffusion and glamorization of “spectacle,” it also increasingly makes it part of the banality of daily life, and promotes the diffusion of photographic clichés. Circulated through a plethora of photographic “likeness[es],” the very uniqueness of the film diva is undermined, constantly at risk of being revealed as, or reduced to, “only one-twelfth of a dozen Tiller girls.”⁸⁹ In fact, in this “flood of photos” that “destroy[s] the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits,” and makes the “original” “disappear in its multiplicity,” “the world itself,” in Kracauer’s view, “has taken on a ‘photographic face.’”⁹⁰

Over thirty years after Kracauer’s and Benjamin’s interventions, *L’eclisse* presents a reality where the diffusion and ordinariness of the medium is immediately obvious. The abundance of photographs in Marta’s apartment, as wall decorations and book illustrations, is buttressed by the recursive presence of photos throughout the film (as old family portraits, posters, or on newspapers or gadgets). While this underscores photography’s mass dissemination as a technology of image production and reproduction, it is not only the medium that appears ordinary. The subjects of

⁸⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography” [1927], in *The Mass Ornament*, 58.

the photographs are clichéd too. The fact that the images in Marta's apartment depict Africa actually reinforces this.⁹¹ It spotlights that it is precisely because of the diffusion of photography (and other mass media such as film and television), that such hitherto unfamiliar subject matter is "domesticated" and becomes thoroughly commonplace. Marta's photographs portray Africa through a tourist-brochure kind of imagery. As some of them may well be enlargements of Marta's own snapshots, this points to how even such personal images, rather than being idiosyncratically original, tend often to replicate and feed on photographic tropes and conventions. Among others, the camera closes-up on sunsets over Lake Naivasha, Mount Kilimanjaro, the savannah with lions and, as Vittoria casually engages the needle into a record which, fittingly, starts playing some African drumming, "ethnic" images of Kenyan men and women in full tribal attire. The basic photographic attributes of "there" and "then"⁹² are in these images further endowed with connotations of the "exotic" and the "primitive," through which Africa is inserted into the ordinary as a tamed extraordinary: the typical "place of escape" advertised in holiday brochures.

Yet, the scene does more than register a historical relation between photography and boredom. It also articulates a dynamics of boredom in relation to the photographs, through which, in accordance with the arguments of Benjamin, Kracauer, Fenichel and Heidegger, the phenomenon is problematized as

⁸⁹ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 58-59.

⁹¹ For a compelling discussion of *L'eclisse* in the context of post-colonialism in Italy, see: Karen Pinkus, "Empty Spaces: Decolonization in Italy," Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Drawing on the relation between EUR (the quarter in Rome in which most of *L'eclisse* is set) and fascist imperialism, Pinkus offers a reading of Antonioni's film, and this scene in particular, in terms of Italian imperialism and decolonization, two equally "eclipsed" phases of Italian history.

quintessentially a question of what to do with time. While at first the women kill time by looking at the photographs, on which the movie camera itself zooms and lingers, at a point a different way of filling it is devised. An abrupt cut interrupts the protracted pan across the photos of tribespeople being contemplated by Vittoria. The next shot, announced by a livelier, more sustained African rhythm, reveals an unrecognizable Vittoria (indeed, it takes a while to work out that the actress is still Monica Vitti). In “blackface,” minstrel-like, with earrings and a heavy choker around her neck, she stands next to a photograph that has served as “model.” Wrapped in a white sheath and with spear in hand, she is now a tribeswoman herself or, at least, so thinks Anita who, pointing at the photo, exclaims: “Doesn’t she look like it? Identical!” This cut has introduced a temporal ellipsis: and, indeed, as we do not see the lengthy process of Vittoria’s transformation, a rather disorienting one at first. But, in so doing, it also functions as another sort of spatial and temporal dislocation: that of Vittoria’s imaginary escape *into* the space and time of the stills, through her act of mimicry.

For Roger Caillois, mimicry could be called upon to illustrate the delusions characteristic of certain mental disorders, whereby the person affected feels as if separated from his/her self. In schizophrenia, for example, “the individual,” so to speak, “breaks the boundaries of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses.”⁹³ At play in psychic phenomena of this type is, according to Caillois, a process of “*depersonalization by assimilation to space*”; a process to which, in nature, one finds an equivalent in the mimetic faculty.⁹⁴ But if Vittoria’s imitation may evoke the

⁹² Cf. Barthes’s characterization, in *Camera Lucida*, of the photograph as “that-has-been.” “In Photography,” he argues, “I can never deny that *the thing has been there*,” 76-77 (emphasis in original).

⁹³ Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” [1935], trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (Winter 1984), 17-32. 30 cited.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

“*depersonalization by assimilation*” that, for Caillois, is central to both mimicry and certain disturbances of subjectivity, her very attempt to become, in a way, *like* the photograph, further resonates with his characterization of mimicry *itself* as a kind of photography. “Morphological mimicry,” Caillois in fact proposes, “could then be, after the fashion of chromatic mimicry, an actual photography, but of the form and the relief, a photography on the level of the object and not of the image, a reproduction in three-dimensional space.”⁹⁵ In Vittoria’s act of mimicry, on the other hand, the model to “reproduce” is precisely the two-dimensionality of the photographic image itself: is this an allusion to Kracauer’s reflection that reality has assumed a “photographic face”?

For Marta, the photographs may well have significance because of their indexical specificity: she may cherish them as “props” for remembering, tools for managing her personal memories. For the other two women, on the contrary, not only do the photographs belong to a collective – if not “impersonal” – dimension but, also, they function as objects of entertainment and distraction, aids, we could say, for forgetting oneself and one’s boredom. What Vittoria and Anita value in their holiday-brochure imagery is the kitsch, and racially laden, spatial ambiguity of the “exotic” and temporal a-temporality of the “primitive.” While these images provide the inspiration for Vittoria’s mimetic game, and one photo in particular constitutes her “model,” she does not fall *still* like them. Unlike some of Thomas’s real-life models in *Blow-up*, who maintain the same rigidity and, indeed, stillness they have assumed for the camera even when they are not posing for it anymore, Vittoria, though imitating an actual photograph, does not simply strike a pose, as one might in a tableau vivant. Inspired by the photographic spectacle as a whole, in fact, she

⁹⁵ Ibid., 23.

proceeds, in her turn, to make *herself* spectacle. And, as she energetically spins and whirls around the flat in a mock tribal dance and chant, this is, indeed, quite literal (ill. 15, p. 343).

And, now, in light of Vittoria's "show," we can reconsider the relation between the women's boredom and photography. Her performance hinges around the intrinsic link between distraction and boredom pinpointed by Kracauer, Fenichel, and Moravia, for all of whom the former (as simple diversion or organized entertainment) is a latent manifestation of the latter. Indeed, Vittoria mimes the very forms of spectacle analysed by Kracauer, through which, though ostensibly evaded, boredom is in fact, at the same time, manifested. As she literally makes *herself* entertainment, we could say that her boredom does not simply become like, but is actually embodied *as*, distraction – a distraction that belies the "special type" of "forgetfulness" highlighted in Moravia's novel. Furthermore, what she imitates, or even incarnates, is the very medium of photography, the looking at of which has been an early symptom of her boredom. Her reproduction of the photos also reiterates the reproducibility of the medium itself, thus gearing her boredom to the aesthetics of repetition, and economy of mass (re)production, in which it is historically rooted.

Significantly, though, as Vittoria's boredom is exhibited through the apparently antithetical category of distraction, she is not spectator but actor. Therefore her condition is also, to paraphrase Benjamin's expression, an "index of participation" in modernity. Whether or not her immersion in modernity is a sign of her partaking of collective alienation (Benjamin's "sleep"), it is an active one. The frenetic yet purposeless dynamism of Vittoria's performative act crystallizes how her boredom is both a marker and a direct precipitate of her social mobility, with its

limitations and accompanying dissatisfactions. In fact, it is precisely by being thus articulated that boredom's paradoxical, contradictory structure is further thrown into relief. For Fenichel, boredom specifies an ambivalent relation between apathy and unrest, activity and inactivity. Even when it manifests itself as external "quiet," boredom belies "internal restlessness."⁹⁶ This is so, according to Fenichel, because boredom is a form of desire: a "craving for adequate objects" which is, however, aimless, as the desired object is identified only in the negative, by excluding as "inadequate" all that is available.⁹⁷ (Indeed, perhaps this very negativity makes of boredom a self-reflexive demonstration of desire itself as, more recently, Adam Phillips has suggested by summarising the condition as "the wish for a desire."⁹⁸) As the tension and agitation structuring desire can be both internal and external, so boredom's inner restlessness, in Fenichel's view, can sometimes spill over on the outside, become manifested externally as "motor restlessness," "fidgetiness," or even "the instinct for wandering" and for "find[ing] 'distraction' through a change of environment" which affect the psychopath.⁹⁹ As the relative repose of looking at the photographs gives way to the agitation and the "escape" of Vittoria's dance, boredom in *L'eclisse* is presented in just these terms: a phenomenological alternation between action and inaction, as well as an unresolved tension between apathy and restlessness, mobility and stagnation. Punctuating the film with stillness, but a

⁹⁶ Fenichel, "On the Psychology of Boredom," 294.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 293.

⁹⁸ Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 68.

⁹⁹ Fenichel, "On the Psychology of Boredom," 294 and 300. Whilst Fenichel was keen to categorize boredom on its own as, in effect, a condition generated by the routinization of metropolitan life, he also drew a parallel between boredom and manic-depressive states (300). The structure of tension and alternation between quiet and restlessness Fenichel outlines in boredom chimes, in many respects, with the cyclical recurrence of apparently opposed states in manic-depression first described by Karl Abraham, "Notes on the Psycho-Analytical Investigation and Treatment of Manic-Depressive Insanity and Allied Conditions" [1911], in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham*, ed. Ernest Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1949). In the 1950s and 1960s, the psychiatrist Schachtel aligned boredom and depression again precisely by discussing them both as a cyclical alternation of restless and manic

stillness that is, in fact, “moving”, the photographs accentuate and underscore both this alternation and this tension. And it is to a consideration of how boredom may not only be “described” in *L’eclisse*’s story but also, at some level, “embodied” in the film that I shall turn shortly. First, however, we need to look more closely at the temporal structure of boredom itself.

Boredom, Cinema and the Photographic

Making Time Palpable

Addressing the phenomenon via the exemplary figures of the gambler, the *flâneur*, and “he who waits,” Benjamin, as we have seen, emphasizes the intrinsic link between boredom and temporality. In doing so, furthermore, he sketches, in terms similar to Fenichel, a polarity between repose and action *within* the time of boredom. The mobility of the gambler and the *flâneur* is juxtaposed to the stasis of the person who waits. Each of their conditions, in turn, is not permanent but, to a certain extent, interchangeable, and thus representative of moments within boredom itself. This same co-existence of movement and stillness surfaces in Kracauer’s accounts of the occupancy of time in boredom. Indeed, as “saunter[ing] through the streets” gives way to sitting “silent and lifeless,” in the process of “gawking at the silver screen,” and waiting and “busy-ness” rotate, moments of activity and passivity emerge as different sides of the same coin.¹⁰⁰ For Warhol, too, who notoriously thrived in the boring, boredom’s temporality consisted of a hovering between action and

phases. See Ernest G. Schachtel, *Metamorphoses: On the Development of Affect, Perception,*

inaction.¹⁰¹ “Everyone knows how it is,” he explained, “some days one can sit and look out of the windows for hours and hours and some days one can’t sit still for a single second.”¹⁰² As well as outlining a co-existence of apparent opposites within boredom – such as social mobility and stagnation, psychic aboulia and restlessness, physical motion and stasis – Moravia also lays emphasis on the recursive structure of its temporality. Indeed, it is these very alternations that engender the recurrence. This is concisely summarized by Dino, who compares the condition to the “repeated and mysterious interruption of the electric current inside a house,” whereby one moment there is light and the next “darkness and an empty void.”¹⁰³ Through these metaphors of intermittence, the time of boredom is presented not only as a flow that includes its own negation – its own interruptions – but, also, as repetitive and, even, somewhat circular.

Commenting on one of Baudelaire’s poems in the “Spleen et idéal” cycle of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Benjamin paraphrases that “in the *spleen*, time becomes palpable; the minutes cover a man like snowflakes.”¹⁰⁴ While the two states certainly diverge in many ways (Baudelaire’s spleen is tinged with melancholia), this “palpability” of time applies to boredom too. Indeed, it is one of the consequences of boredom being a problem of time and how to occupy it, that time itself comes to be felt as an excess, a weight, when one would otherwise be unconscious or unaware of it. Fenichel’s polarity between quiet and restlessness, Dino’s metaphor of a recurrent blackout, Benjamin’s, Kracauer’s and Warhol’s descriptions of an alternation of repose and action, all draw attention to the *how*, to the dynamics by which time becomes

Attention and Memory [1959] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 233-234.

¹⁰⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, “Boredom” [1924], in *The Mass Ornament*, 332-33.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of Warhol and boredom alternative to the one I pursue here, see: Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 100-106.

¹⁰² Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, 50.

¹⁰³ Moravia, *La noia*, 7.

“palpable.” What materializes time in boredom, renders it evident and felt, is precisely a dialectic between stillness and movement. For, in boredom, time is experienced as just this painful tension: something that fails to pass *while* passing nevertheless, falling with the same unhurried suspension as snowflakes. In the paradox, the oxymoron, of this suspension, time becomes long. This same dialectic is at play in *L’eclisse* and, indeed, it is the means through which, as well as being described diegetically, the time of boredom is also rendered in the “form” of the film. Where the photographs are the diegetic element through which the women’s boredom is articulated, they also crystallize and disclose the dynamics by which the phenomenon is made a “matter” of aesthetics.

With its rather emphatic focus on the stills, the scene in Marta’s apartment stages an encounter between photography and cinema. Deeply imbricated with time since their very emergence – from its capture and representation, to its reconceptualization and management –, these technologies are usually related to two different aspects of it. Where photography, as in Bazin’s famous account, is linked to stillness and the instant, cinema is associated with movement and duration. And, together, these technologies do not simply “manifest” these opposing attributes of time but, in fact, actively contribute to configure them as such. If photography seizes the instant, the very notion of the instant is, in turn, dependent on the photographic. Bellour, as I have discussed, has analysed the scenario in which, within the terrain of the moving image, cinema and photography meet. For Bellour, this photographic time being opened up inside cinematic time “becomes both the pose and the pause of the film.”¹⁰⁵ “The film,” the title of the essay intimates, is “stilled,” giving *us* time to reflect on the motionless and photographic basis, as well as origin, of cinema itself.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 180.

This “remediation” of photography in cinema, however, changes both media. Where the emergence of photographic stillness may seem to take the moving image against its own grain, a filmed photograph is still, *yet* moving; it is a stillness *in* movement, with a set duration. And while, as in *The Parallax View*, we may find a montage of still images in rapid succession in a film, most often, when the photograph emerges within the cinema, it is made to *last*, to *endure*. The movie camera, that is, generally “holds” it and lingers over it for a time that outlasts the “instant” embodied by the photographic itself.

As in *nostalgia* and *Blow-up*, it is not one still photograph, but many, that are filmed in *L’eclisse*: the photographic instant is “encored,” it is repeated as well as prolonged. Indeed, while there is a surfacing of the static time of the photographic in *L’eclisse*, the film is not so much “stilled” by this emergence as, rather, slowed, over a period of a few minutes during which the camera continues to alternate between the African images and the women. In fact, the camera does not fixate upon the photographs statically. Rather, it slowly zooms in on them and then lingers, perhaps focusing on a detail, or it gradually reveals their surface by unhurriedly scanning across one or a horizontal series of photos tacked to the wall, as in the shot preceding Vittoria’s dressing up. The cumulative effect of the recurrence of the still lingered over, zoomed in, panned across, is a *stilling* that does not quite stop the film; it is the production, indeed, of a certain slowness.

For the Belgian kinetic artist Pol Bury, writing in a short manifesto entitled “Time Dilated” (1964), “slowness” lay “between the immobile and mobility.” Revealed as a paradoxical suspension between these antithetical poles, slowness is,

¹⁰⁵ Bellour, “The Film Stilled,” 108.

for Bury, a “quality” that “dilates” time.¹⁰⁶ Generated by the insertion of the still in the moving image, a poise between mobility and immobility is what characterizes the scene in *L’eclisse*. Indeed, Bury’s formulation illuminates how slowness, here, is a feature of the polarity, and consequent “elongation,” of time that the cinematic remediation of the photographs generates. The slowness of this scene, to a certain extent functioning as, in its turn, the “still” core within the moving image of the film as such, is also a precipitate of the overall slowness of *L’eclisse*. The oscillation at play here, in fact, pertains to the film in its entirety, which, formally *and* diegetically is composed of a dialectic between stasis and motion that dilates its time, renders it long. Actual still images, as well as people looking *like* stills, punctuate the film. So for example, Vittoria’s apartment, like the cut to the photograph re-locating to Marta’s, is also introduced by a protracted shot of a poster on one of its walls, and Vittoria herself is often framed standing still within the frame of a window. And, narratively too, *L’eclisse* is threaded through with stillness, with “the moments when, apparently, nothing is happening,” that Antonioni asserted he “liked” in films, and wanted to include in his own.¹⁰⁷ From the dialogue-less opening sequence chronicling not “the end” of a love affair, but the moments just afterwards, when all has been said, to the long concluding one from which the protagonists have vanished, the film is embroidered with the “dead times” of time itself. Adorno pointed to this tension in *La notte*, in whose pursuit of the “uncinematic” within the cinematic, in his view, movement was both “denied and yet preserved” through the stasis of the characters. This paradox, for Adorno, gave the film “the power to express, as if with hollow eyes, the emptiness of time.”¹⁰⁸ And, as boredom is a

¹⁰⁶ Pol Bury, “Time Dilated” [1964], in Dore Ashton, *Pol Bury* (Paris: Maeght Editeur, 1970), 107.

¹⁰⁷ Aldo Tassone, “Conversazione” [interview with Michelangelo Antonioni, 1985], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 209.

¹⁰⁸ Adorno, “Transparencies on Film,” 156.

problem of time's emptiness and how to fill it, we could even say that it is precisely *L'eclisse*'s literal remediation of the photographic that encapsulates and discloses the dynamics by which Antonioni's cinema may be seen to court an aesthetics of boredom. The way in which Antonioni's films, through a paradoxical dynamics of stillness, may elicit boredom as an experiential response is both symptomatic of, and embedded within, the valorization of slowness, duration and, indeed, boredom itself, as aesthetic strategies in the period at large. I shall conclude this chapter with a brief overview of this wider context. Focusing on Warhol and Duras in particular, I shall consider how, though not through the insertion of actual photographs, the stillness of the photographic may nevertheless be seen to (re)emerge within cinema, and be yoked to a phenomenology of boredom.

The Pursuit of Boredom

"*Blow-up* viewed as a video in 1995," Iain Sinclair proclaims in *Lights Out for the Territory*,

provokes an overwhelming urge to rush the tape to the cutting-room for emergency amputation: lose those appalling rag day students, the tennis court mime, most of the secondary performances. Hack it to the bone: some urban driving, some interplay in the studio, the park. Reduce it to essence, to Cortázar's original story.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* [1997] (London: Granta Books, 1998), 351. Antonioni's *Blow-up* is loosely inspired by a short story by the Argentinian Julio Cortázar, "Las babas del diablo" [1959], translated as "Blow-up," in *Blow-up and Other Stories*, trans. Paul Blackburn (New York: Collier, 1974).

“Hack it to the bone”: Sinclair seems to have gone some way towards this mandate in his own VHS copy. “The start of *my* version of the film,” he explains, “after I’ve eliminated all the tedious cross-cutting with white-face extras,” is the shot in which Thomas leaves the doss house where he has spent the night.¹¹⁰ Sinclair’s impatience brings to mind an episode involving Yvonne Rainer, who recently expressed a similar frustration with one of her *own* films. After a screening of her *Lives of Performers* (1972) at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 2003, she thanked the audience for putting up with it and apologized for the film being too long, saying that she “would not do that *kind* of duration, *now*.”¹¹¹ Her first feature-length film, *Lives of Performers* runs at 90 minutes: where it may be slightly long with respect to the average duration of an experimental piece, it is not long as a “narrative” film. And, indeed, for this work, as well as for her filmic oeuvre as a whole, which Noël Carroll characterizes as “novelistic,” Rainer is credited with being among those who re-introduced “story” within avant-garde cinema, after the “abstractions” of the structural film.¹¹²

Teasing as they may be, Sinclair’s and Rainer’s contemporary reactions to the “*kind* of duration” of these films bring into focus the shared territory between Antonioni’s – “commercial” – cinema and the art scene of the time if not, even, more broadly, a key aspect of the aesthetics of that moment. Whilst Rainer, and Frampton (who greatly admired her work), injected some storytelling into the experimental film of the 1960s and 1970s, Antonioni is often seen to have taken the narrative away from the narrative film itself.¹¹³ In fact, in *Blow-up*, as in most of Antonioni’s cinema, it is not so much that there is no story, as that the “essence” Sinclair wants to

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Yvonne Rainer speaking at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 30 July 2003.

¹¹² Noël Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 321.

¹¹³ See e.g. Rohdie, *Antonioni*, 68.

get to is inextricably imbricated with “the echo, the refractions, and the eccentric waves of events” the film also “gather[s],” as Giorgio Tinazzi put it.¹¹⁴ So that, in fact, one might even be tempted to say that there is no “bone” to be hacked to, or that, on the contrary, all is “bone.” In the end, the point is that, bone or not, the film stands as it is. At just under two hours, its being “long” is not so much a matter of actual length but, as with Rainer’s film, of pace – and indeed, we could say, remembering Bury’s paradoxical definition, of slowness. Its dilution of narrative and dilation of duration, through, in fact, an antithesis of stasis and motion that the inclusion of the photographs, like in *L’eclisse*, redoubles formally, manifests Antonioni’s project to “reproduce,” cinematically, “the rhythm of life.”¹¹⁵ For Antonioni, as we have seen, this rhythm is stop and start, “motionless” and “spinning,” and in fact its “pauses, transitions, silences” are actually “the most authentic part of human experience.”¹¹⁶ If, rather than on video, we sit through *Blow-up* in the cinema, the *endurance* of the “tedious” bits which, like Sinclair, we may want to fast-forward – if not, rather drastically, delete – is precisely part of the experience. So, the diegetic inclusion of what Deleuze calls Antonioni’s “idle periods of everyday banality,” is also, at some level, translated into the form of the film, called into play in its reception.¹¹⁷

For John Cage, the endurance of extended – and extensible – duration was crucial to experience, and to the experience of art in particular. He praised it in his “Lecture on Indeterminacy,” which, consisting of thirty one-minute stories when first performed in 1958, had tripled to ninety by the following year. “If something is boring after two minutes,” Cage suggested there, “try it for four. If still boring, try it

¹¹⁴ Tinazzi, “The Gaze and the Story,” xxii.

¹¹⁵ Antonioni, “A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work,” 202.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., and Aldo Tassone, “Conversazione,” 208.

¹¹⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 5.

for eight, sixteen, thirty-two and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting."¹¹⁸ Relating boredom to repetition and to the dragging out of time, Cage's provocative statement earmarked this moment when, in the arts, it became of interest as a condition to be actively pursued. Cage was indeed suggesting that we should pursue the boring – that we should, in fact, repeat it again and again, as repetition will make even the boring interesting. Where Cage might have recouped the boring by means of the interesting, Warhol was happy to like it for being *just* boring: "I've been quoted a lot as saying, 'I like boring things.' Well, I said it and I meant it. But that doesn't mean I'm not bored by them."¹¹⁹ Both Cage's and Warhol's statements are exemplary of the self-conscious way in which boredom was pursued in the 1960s and 1970s.

Inscribed within the wider project of attempting a reconciliation between "art" and "life," whether the intention – as with Warhol – might have been to elevate quotidian drudgery to art and "fame" or – as with Cage – to bring art down to the ordinary, this often involved the use of prosaic objects, noises, banal actions. And, in this "project," photography, film, and the then emerging technologies of magnetic sound recording and video played a crucial role. Of course, their diffusion, and the development of lightweight and affordable equipment, provided the very means with which, easily and almost effortlessly, to seize the everyday and the banal. Warhol was obsessed by recording; as Peter Wollen put it, "he was a compulsive hoarder of every detail of his daily life," who at his death, in addition to nearly 300 films, left over 4,000 sound and video tapes.¹²⁰ Indeed, Warhol had meant to "record

¹¹⁸ Cage first delivered the lecture in 1958 in Brussels, and, in 1959, at Teachers College, Columbia, where sixty more stories had been added. See: John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 93, where this story appears as a filler, and 260.

¹¹⁹ Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, 50.

¹²⁰ Peter Wollen, "Raiding the Ice Box," in Michael O'Pray, ed., *Andy Warhol Film Factory* (London: BFI, 1989), 21. Warhol bought a tape recorder in 1964, and a portable video camera in 1970, and kept

everything” quite literally but, as he confessed to Jonas Mekas, had to admit it was physically impossible.¹²¹ Claiming that “reality” was his ultimate cinematic aim, Antonioni, too, was not immune from this Warholian dream of documentation. Fittingly, perhaps, given his interest in the dead times of time, he once remembered how he had wished to “sleep with the movie camera at my side – so as to document what happens while I am absent, while I am sleeping; and also, what happens to me.”¹²² As these technologies enabled the capture and storage of the everyday (if not *all* of it, at least good chunks), they also, in so doing, offered a means to *fill* the time of the everyday itself. Nauman’s series of films of his solitary, and apparently aimless, “exercises” in his studio – such as *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, or *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio* (both 1967-68) – represent both a way to kill time and to record it. (And of course, the question these films raise is also, specifically, that of the artist’s time, and of what to do with it once the traditional art object has been “dematerialized.”¹²³) Thus Nauman’s films, like Warhol’s obsessive recording, while making representational technologies part of the attempt to evade boredom also, at some level, function as a manifestation, if not even a *materialization*, of the very phenomenon. Contemporary with the proliferation of boredom, these technologies do not simply “represent” it: they contribute to configuring it, and to structuring our

audio and film “diaries.” For further details about Warhol’s sound and video recording see: Mark Francis, ed., *Andy Warhol: The Late Work* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004), esp. 122, and Glenn O’Brian “Interview with Andy Warhol” [1976], esp. 60.

¹²¹ Jonas Mekas, “Notes After Seeing the Films of Andy Warhol,” in John Coplans, ed., *Andy Warhol* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1970), 41.

¹²² Michelangelo Antonioni, “Dieci Domande” [1985], in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 203.

¹²³ Cf. Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966-1972* [1973] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Joanna Lowry discussed this triangulation between artistic production, technology and boredom in her paper “Playing with Time,” delivered at “Old/New?” 30th Annual Conference of the Association of Art Historians, University of Nottingham, UK, 1-3 April 2004.

experience of its time. And, perhaps, boredom's temporality may even be said to have something of the photographic, or of the cinematic or, indeed, of both.

For Le Grice, Warhol's films, which Sitney saw as at the origin of the self-reflexivity of the structural film, designated a moment when boredom started to become "a *cinematic* principle."¹²⁴ But, in fact, the early films to which Le Grice is especially alluding are very "uncinematic," as Adorno might have put it. *Empire* (1964) and *Sleep* (1963), perhaps the most notorious among the dozens Warhol made in the mid-1960s, deliver no more than what they promise in their titles: fixed-angle views respectively of the Empire State building and of a man sleeping. Referring to these early films in a late interview, Warhol said that his "old stuff is better to talk about than to see. It always sounds better than it really is."¹²⁵ And, certainly, these works are more often talked about than watched in their entirety, for, if they fulfil the expectation raised by their titles, they also exceed it. *Empire* and *Sleep* present us with their "subject" for the unendurable lengths of eight and six hours respectively, and, just in case the "action" should be too fast, though shot at twenty-four frames per second, they are meant to be viewed at the slower rate of sixteen. Outraged when seeing *Sleep* at standard speed, Stan Brakhage was apparently won over when Mekas convinced him to sit down again and watch it at 16fps.¹²⁶ What may this slowing down reveal? While, in their excessiveness, the very durations of *Empire* and *Sleep* may suggest an inevitable link with the "long while" of boredom, it is precisely their slowness that is the key to how an actual, measurable length (indeed, quite great in this case) is made to *feel* long. Their slowness (of the projection speed *and* of the shots as such) is indeed the tension "between the immobile and mobility" outlined by

¹²⁴ Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 121, my emphasis. Adams Sitney, "Structural Film," 321ff.

¹²⁵ Gleen O'Brian, "Interview with Andy Warhol," 59. On Warhol's dissatisfaction with his films see also: Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001), 56.

¹²⁶ Mekas, "Notes After Re-seeing the Films of Andy Warhol," 28-30.

Bury, by which the films look still, yet are still moving and, like boredom's temporal structure itself, their time seems not to pass, while, indeed, it does.

While not literally, as in *nostalgia*, *One Second in Montreal*, *Blow-up* and *L'eclisse*, Warhol's films, too, stage an encounter between photography and cinema and, indeed, a remediation of the one into the other. Their overtly static quality remediates the photographic within the cinematic. Remediation here may even seem to call into play the idea of a "reversion" of the moving to the still image. Yet, this convergence, this assimilation between the two media is at once evoked and negated; it is, in a way, permanently "in process," and suspended, within the films themselves.

This is perhaps best encapsulated by the "Screen Tests" produced by Warhol between 1964 and 1966. They consist of portraits of visitors to his Factory whom Warhol deemed to have a "star" quality, whether actually already famous or not. These visitors – among whom were "Baby" Jane Holzer, Salvador Dalí, Bob Dylan and Susan Sontag – would be seated in front of a 16mm movie camera, fixed on a tripod, and asked to keep as still as possible for three to four minutes (the time, that is, taken by a 100-foot reel of film to run through the camera). Overall, the Warhol Foundation has now about 500 of these units: yet more still might have been produced, and gone astray, or be in possession of some of the sitters. A bit like individual photographs extracted from a series, or an album, some of the "Screen Tests" have been used within different films, including *13 Most Beautiful Women* and *13 Most Beautiful Boys* (both 1964).¹²⁷

¹²⁷ While they often get *passim* mentions, the "Screen Tests" have not been thoroughly analysed. Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* [1981] (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 154–160, was probably the first to discuss the project in some detail. The most extensive account to date is Paul Arthur, "No Longer Absolute: Portraiture in American Avant-Garde Documentary Films of the Sixties," in Ivone Margulies, ed., *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), which discusses them within the genre of the "portrait film." See esp. 106–

Mekas, Paul Arthur reminds us, had been among the first to highlight the “primitive” qualities of Warhol’s films (the fixed camera, the idea of filming until stock runs out, and so on). Warhol, Mekas argued, was “taking cinema back to its origins, to the days of Lumière, for a rejuvenation and a cleansing.”¹²⁸ Yet, Arthur retorts, “the remark does not go far enough. In truth Warhol took cinema back to the dawn of still photography.”¹²⁹ The “Screen Tests” in particular, he continues, revisit the nineteenth-century practice of using a small mounted photographic portrait as a *carte-de-visite*. For not only do Warhol’s “film portraits” function as a modern *carte-de-visite* – both, in a way, constitute a “passport” into a certain social milieu –, but they also echo the long posing times early photography required. Asked to “freeze” for several minutes, Warhol’s sitters had to behave in front of the movie camera in the same way in which patrons of early photographic studios had to behave in front of the still camera.¹³⁰ Yet, faced by the prospect of four minutes of motionlessness, not all sitters followed Warhol’s instructions: some openly subverted them, moving about both within and without the frame, others engaged in more contained “performances” or, even, just some banal action (like fiddling with hair). In any case, however still they might have tried to be, in these prolonged close-ups one can always detect the movements of the face: breathing, blinking, small twitches, a slight parting of the lips, a sniffle. Apparently, the idea for these portraits came from Warhol’s friend and collaborator Gerard Malanga, who, needing a publicity still of himself, thought he would go about it by having a long cinematic close-up made,

109. Paul Arthur previously analysed the role of portraiture in Warhol in “Flesh of Absence: Resighting the Warhol Catechism,” in O’Pray, *Andy Warhol Film Factory*. David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film of the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 68–69 also considers the “portraiture” and “documentary” features of Warhol’s films. See also: Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol’s Art and Films* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 154–56.

¹²⁸“The Independent Film Award” [Jonas Mekas’s speech for the 6th Award, 1964] in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 427.

¹²⁹ Arthur, “No Longer Absolute,” 107.

from which he would then select a frame to have printed as a photograph. As this anecdote further crystallizes, where the “Screen Tests” certainly represent a moment in which cinema most overtly approximates the photographic, they are also, at the same time, very different from photography as such. Crucially, it is only by undoing the cinematic that an actual photograph can be obtained. Warhol’s cumulative series of “moving” and “durational” stills brings to light how boredom became (in Le Grice’s expression) “a cinematic principle” when, paradoxically, cinema became, in a way, less like itself, and more, but *not quite*, like the photograph.

Many of the features characterizing Warhol’s films – the haunting of cinema by the photograph, the representation of the banality and repetitiveness of the everyday, and the aesthetic “reproduction” of boredom itself in the encounter with the viewer – are also at play in Duras’s *India Song*. Itself a story *about* boredom, *India Song* also dovetails with the scene from *L’eclisse* with which I started, but without photographs. For where in Antonioni’s film the women look at actual photographs, as souvenirs, or relics of Africa, in *India Song* it is the characters themselves that are relics, or ghosts. In *India Song*, photographic stillness impregnates the film because the story and the characters themselves are, in a way, “cinematic photographs.” The film, in fact, is composed of a repetitive series of “snapshots” and “tableaux” – at aural as well as visual level – in which the characters are often static, if not, even, “frozen.”

India Song revolves around the character of Anne-Marie Stretter, the promiscuous wife of a French diplomat in a province of Indochina in the 1920s. Stretter, we learn, commits suicide after one of her lovers (“the man from Lahore”) has also done so. This story is told, only fragmentarily and disconnectedly, through a

¹³⁰ Benjamin, “A Small History of Photography” [1931], suggests that, because of the long exposure

collage of off-screen voices largely based on repetitions and refrains. This narration post-dates the event, as the voices are meant to belong to guests gossiping about it some time (maybe years) later at an embassy party in Calcutta. The on-screen characters belong to yet another, more recent, timeframe. Wandering through the now empty salons and derelict gardens of the embassy palace, they silently “incarnate” the subject of the scandalous rumours being reported on the soundtrack, “re-enacting” the fateful reception at the end of which, feeling rejected by her, Stretter’s lover goes mad and kills himself. Thus, in this palimpsest of different times, Stretter and the man from Lahore themselves are only ever evoked. Whether in the voices or in the images, they are only ever a ghostlike presence whose very absence, as in a relic (which, of course, a photograph or a film also are themselves) haunts the film.

India Song’s story is one of colonial oppression, but in which, ironically, it is the oppressors who are the oppressed: buried alive in – and indeed killed by – their own “privileged” situation.¹³¹ The voices evoke “the heat, the monotony, the boredom” stifling that world. At one point, the boredom afflicting it is referred to as “a leprosy of the heart” that, like the disease, “slows down people’s movements.” And, indeed, the on-screen characters do not do much. As the aural narration proceeds by the reiterated evocation of certain “images,” so the visible actors constantly loop between a fixed, and limited, repertoire of actions. In effect, this consists of either strolling and dancing with each other, or giving in to a lethargy that makes them lie on the floor, slump into sofas and armchairs or, sometimes, freeze into a kind of tableau (ills. 16 and 17, pp. 344-45).

time, “the subject as it were grew into the picture,” 245 and 247.

¹³¹ Cf. Renate Günther, *Marguerite Duras* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 33.

“There is a new dimension,” Duras tried to explain in an interview just after the film’s release:

I don’t know offhand, I can’t quite put it into words. It’s a co-existential dimension, something similar to what one finds in chemistry, simultaneously in the film and in the person watching it. [...] It is no longer a story which you are being told from the outside, and from which you remain aloof. Spectator and spectacle share a common existence. [...] You’re being invited to come to another place. And it’s not just the place the narration tells about, it’s also the place where the narration is happening.¹³²

This “co-existential dimension,” this *other* place “where the narration is happening” is in fact, also, a time, the very time of the characters’ boredom, which cinematic time, impregnated with the stillness and repetitiveness of the photographic, both reproduces and produces in its unfolding.¹³³ Boredom’s contradictory structure, that is, is made a “matter” of aesthetics through its isomorphism with the paradoxical qualities of stasis in the cinema.

¹³² Carlos Clarens, “*India Song* and Marguerite Duras,” *Sight and Sound* 45 (Winter 1975-76), 32-35. 34 and 35 cited.

¹³³ For a different reading, see Daniela Trastulli, *Dalla Parola all’immagine: viaggio nel cinema di Marguerite Duras* (Genoa: Bomi Editore, 1982), in whose view *India Song* induces a sort of “hypnosis” in the spectator, 103.

Chapter 3: Sound and Sound Recording

Time...is what we and sounds happen in.

John Cage¹

It began early in life. [...] It then turned into an enthusiasm for editing shorthand records, gramophone recordings. Into a special interest in the possibility of documentary sound recording. Into experiments in recording, with words and letters, the noise of a waterfall, the sounds of a lumbermill, etc. And one day in the spring of 1918...returning from a train station. There lingered in my ears the sighs and rumble of the departing train...someone's swearing...a kiss...someone's exclamation...laughter, a whistle, voices, the ringing of the station bell, the puffing of the locomotive...whispers, cries, farewells....And thoughts while walking: I must get a piece of equipment that won't describe, but will record, photograph these sounds. Otherwise it's impossible to organize, edit them. They rush past, like time. But the movie camera perhaps? Record the visible....Organize not the audible, but the visible world. Perhaps that's the way out?²

Dziga Vertov's 1924 manifesto "The Birth of Kino-Eye," in which the filmmaker who gave us *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) sets out his ideas on the emancipatory potential of "camera vision," is prefaced by this impressionistic tale-of-origin anecdote. With these few enticing lines, Vertov traces the origin of his

¹ John Cage, "45' For a Speaker" [1954], in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 151.

“Kino-Eye,” the use of moving image technology to record “the visible world,” back to his early attempts to employ sound technology to organize “the audible.” In fact, Vertov is suggesting that he initially considered the turn to the movie camera as, and only possibly, a “way out.” In those early days, phonographic media, compared to cinematography, offered very limited manipulability: recordings were taken on metal cylinders or discs, and could not be assembled and managed as easily as Vertov might have wished.³ The facility with which one could cut film stock must have looked like heaven (in *Man with a Movie Camera* cutting and splicing is presented and revealed as “the” simple, yet inexhaustible, magic of cinema). Unable to “get a piece of equipment” that would allow him not simply to “record, photograph these sounds,” but also “to organize, edit them,” Vertov saw hope in cinematography, and – inevitably before the development of a successful technique for synchronising sound with images – resigned himself to trade in the audible for the visible.

On the one hand, Vertov’s move from phonography to cinematography – and from one sensorial order to another – attracts our attention to the curious irony that the work of a filmmaker extolled and fetishized as a *visualist* par excellence was in fact “the result of a frustrated ear.”⁴ Yet, on the other, Vertov’s very break is bridged by a line of continuity, which subtends both his oeuvre and these representational

² Dziga Vertov, “The Birth of Kino-Eye” [1924], in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O’Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 40.

³ In addition to poor reproduction quality, Vertov must have been frustrated by the fact that recordings on cylinders or discs were virtually impossible to cut and edit. (This could only be done by the cumbersome and expensive process of re-recording the master copy on to another disc, stopping and starting when a passage in the original needed to be omitted from the edited version.). For histories of phonographic technology see: Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1994); Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* [1986], trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph 1877-1977*, second revised edition (London: Cassell, 1977).

⁴ Douglas Kahn, “Introduction: Histories of Sound Once Removed,” in Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds., *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 10. For an account of Vertov’s experimentation with sound *before* and *in* cinema, see: Lucy Fisher, “*Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye*,” in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, eds.,

technologies themselves. Indeed, by writing of his desire to “photograph these sounds,” Vertov himself sketches out an area of contiguity between visual and aural technologies.⁵ He wishes that phonography could do to audible reality what photography does to the visible world: enable its representation by permitting one not simply to “describe” it, but actually to capture it physically, to inscribe it indexically, and hence, literally, to preserve it in some form.⁶

Vertov’s urge to record the world, in its acoustic or visual dimension, stems from an awareness that reality is “rush[ing] past,” in constant movement, and rapidly changing. As this response may be seen as symptomatic of the experience of modernity and modernization at large during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was also certainly intensified, in Vertov’s case, by the radical and unprecedented scale of the transformations affecting Russia during the revolutionary period. It is not incidental that for his anecdote Vertov should choose such an emblematic *topos* of the modern world: the train station.⁷ Rather than simply describing it “with words and letters,” as he had previously attempted, he wants a machine that can physically catch a reality *as it changes*. The flow of life in modernity, the processes

Film Sound: Theory and Practice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) and Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 139-144.

⁵ As will be discussed later, the cutting and splicing of sound recordings (as opposed to film soundtracks), together with the portability of equipment Vertov’s documentaristic intent required, only became practically and economically feasible with the diffusion of magnetic tape after World War II. This notwithstanding, when optical soundtrack at last became available in the Soviet Union, Vertov was stopped neither by the bulkiness nor the poor performance of the camera, though lamenting both. He lugged twenty-seven hundred pounds of equipment all the way to the Donbas region in order to record the authentic landscape of industrialization – “mines, factories, trains” – which he then creatively montaged in his first sound film: *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbas*, completed in 1930. See Dziga Vertov, “Let’s Discuss Ukrainfilm’s First Sound Film: *Symphony of the Donbas*” [1930] in Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, 109.

⁶ I glossed the “index” in the Introduction.

⁷ Cf. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Space and Time in the Nineteenth Century* [1971] (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986).

transforming it so rapidly and radically, altering and accelerating its pace, should be represented with new means, with the technologies that modernity itself produces.⁸

Vertov suggests a dual role for representational technologies. They provide not only a “record” of the real, but also a means to “organize, edit” it, and as such their function is both indexical and cognitive. The state-of-the-art phonograph Vertov dreams of would enable the “material” apprehension of the sounds of modern reality by turning them into manipulable recordings to be preserved, organized, archived. Facilitating their study and analysis, this would, in turn, contribute to the critical understanding of modernity itself.

If change and process in the world are a manifestation of the passage of time, then those technologies which enable the capture of events or, even down to the instant, parts of events as they happen, also somehow seize and manifest time itself. As I discussed in the Introduction, the idea that representational technologies (photography, phonography, telephony, cinema, television and so on) both reflect and reflect *upon* time is a prominent feature of discourse throughout their history, one which coexists with a manifold preoccupation with time itself in modernity. As Mary Ann Doane has argued, sound and image reproduction technologies “are crucial to modernity’s reconceptualization of time and its representability,” to the extent that, in their turn, they actually greatly influence and shape our very notions and experiences of temporality.⁹ In short, it is in great part *through* these technologies that we “imagine” or think time.

⁸ Cf. Bertolt Brecht’s discussion of realism in “Popularity and Realism” [written c. 1938; first published 1967], trans. Stuart Hood, in Ronald Taylor, ed., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: NLB, 1977), where he suggests: “New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change,” 82.

⁹ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 4.

André Bazin's juxtaposition of photography as preserving the instant, immobilized as if "in amber," and cinema as "change mummified," that which "embalms" things in their durational flux, is a most famous account of the different ways in which these technologies are seen, more than simply to represent, actually to embody time.¹⁰ Whilst conceding that phonography is also bestowed with this capacity, Bazin seems to think of it as mainly a means for storing music and, therefore, what he considers "aesthetic" as opposed to "real" time. Meanwhile, though his argument hinges on the indexicality of both photography and cinema, it is the latter that Bazin favours and deems the most complete "art of time."¹¹ For, unlike photography, the moving image seems to him to capture what is the essential trait of time: the fact that it passes. Because of movement, that is, cinema can catch time in its very unfolding. It is clear that Vertov also favours technologies of movement. Though talking of "photographing sounds," it is not *still* photography he is thinking of. And in fact when, frustrated by the inadequacy of phonography, he decides to switch medium, it is to the *moving* version of photography he turns.

Sounds "rush past, like time," Vertov comments. His suggestion of an equation between sound and time is based on the intuitive notion that sounds are essentially temporal: very simply, they *take time*, a length of time, however short. Yet the subtler point being made is also that of an inextricable and, even, a reciprocal relation between the two: as sound depends on and takes time, so time *takes sound*, among other things, to manifest itself. Just as for Bazin it is the cinematic image that constitutes the ideal vehicle for time to "expose" itself, so for Vertov – in this instance – it is sound to provide that vehicle, that body. The alluring promise of

¹⁰ André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" [1945], in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., vol. 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14-15.

¹¹ André Bazin, "Death Every Afternoon" [1949], trans. Mark A. Cohen, in Ivone Margulies, ed., *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 30.

phonographic technology would then reside precisely in the fact that it might provide him with the means to capture, to imprint, two things at once: time and sound, or time through and as sound. In providing the means to turn temporal structures like sounds into manipulable objects (recordings), phonography could, quite literally, “materialize” time. More precisely, in both phonography and cinematography, it is the possibility of technologically preserving and articulating the unfolding of time that captivates him. Like Bazin, Vertov is intrigued that these technologies may be made to perform the paradoxical function of *preserving something that passes*.

While the phonographic technology available to him is not yet quite as sensitive, supple and malleable as he would wish it to be, and the time of sounds, or indeed, time *as* sound, still slips away, cinema seems to provide him with the ideal machine. Kino-Eye, he explains, “is a victory against time”: it “is the negative of time,” it counters its passing by storing it.¹² However, with either phonography or cinematography, it is not plain recording of a real duration that is at issue. What is at issue, rather, is the opportunity to articulate time through technology: to employ it, that is, both to reproduce and to produce a representation of time. Just as important as recording, the possibility to organize through editing is that which renders these technologies a tool for the intellectual apprehension, the “thinkability,” of time as well as its “material” capture.

The historical moments considered in this chapter and in my thesis as a whole stand one or more generations apart from that in which the disappointed Vertov is obliged to swap the ear for the eye. The postwar decades marked the moment when the equipment Vertov could only dream of finally became available: the period from the late 1940s to the 1960s saw the gradual development and then

¹² Vertov, “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” 41.

commercial diffusion and popularization of portable magnetic tape recording. Economical, light and pliable, magnetic tape revolutionized the cinema and the music industry alike, both at the point of production and at that of reception. While the phonograph – such as Edison’s prototype of 1877 – was originally both a sound recording and a sound reproduction apparatus in one, the bulk of its commercial diffusion, in its descendants from the gramophone to the turntable, took the format of a playback machine only. After decades, the magnetic tape recorder reversed this: as the technology gradually became more affordable, laypersons and ordinary households could easily obtain a system with which to inscribe as well as listen to sounds.¹³ Well into the age of the talkies, the “magnetic tape revolution” brought substantial changes to cinema, and sound production therein. It facilitated both direct recording on set and post-production mixing by being cheaper and easier to edit than optical film soundtrack (on which, in the last instance, the completed audio would usually be transferred for distribution).

My aim here is to highlight and discuss the same triangulation between time, sound and technology observed in Vertov’s manifesto from the standpoint, or, if we like, the “vantage” point of audio-visual media. A parallel can be drawn between Vertov and Antonioni with regard to their cultural and artistic concerns, as well as with respect to a certain neglect, in criticism, of their attraction to aurality and acoustic technologies.¹⁴ While, unlike Vertov, Antonioni’s engagement with the

¹³ For discussions on the impact of magnetic tape see: Chanan, *Repeated Takes*, 92-115; Gellatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 286ff.; Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 106ff.

¹⁴ Fisher’s article: “*Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye*,” and Kahn’s discussion in *Noise, Water, Meat*, 139-144 partially redress the balance with regard to Vertov. “The conference “*Le sonorità del visibile: immagini, suoni e musica nel cinema di Michelangelo Antonioni*,” held in Ravenna, Italy, on 21-22 May 1999, has partially attempted to redress the balance for Antonioni. The emphasis, however, is on the music in his films rather than sound in general. The conference proceedings have been published as: Alberto Achilli, Alberto Boschi, Gianfranco Casadio, eds., *Le sonorità del visibile: immagini, suoni e musica nel cinema di Michelangelo Antonioni* (Regione Emilia Romagna: Assessorato alla Cultura, 1999). See also: Giuseppe D’Amato, “Antonioni: la poetica dei materiali,” *Bianco e Nero* 62 (January/April 2001), 152-181, which, though reflecting on

cinema is not, in the era of sound film, the result of a “frustrated ear,”¹⁵ he too, like Vertov, is usually extolled as a quintessentially visual director. But Antonioni speaks through sounds, and silences, no less than he speaks through images.¹⁶

Notwithstanding the obvious historical, social and political differences of their respective situations and aims, akin to Vertov’s, Antonioni’s overarching goal is “the expression of the reality of our time,” the representational and formal rendering of the specificity of modernity and time, of time *in* modernity.¹⁷ With regard to this “apprehension” of time and modernity, Antonioni shares with the Soviet filmmaker a keen enthusiasm for the possibilities offered by media technologies produced and evolving within modernity itself. In particular, as in Vertov, there is in Antonioni a far from marginal concern with representing the acoustic landscape of modernity, and with the possibility of embodying and organizing time through sound. Not only is Antonioni as attentive to the aural dimension of modern temporality as he is to its visual aspect, but sound itself is often employed to articulate time, to embed and map temporality into the image. Furthermore, as we shall see, Antonioni shares with Vertov “a phonographic attitude [...] towards the world,” a specific interest in phonographic recording and reproduction, which sometimes surfaces in his films as an actual staging of sound technologies themselves; staging that makes visible the areas of contiguity, continuity and convergence between phonography and cinema.¹⁸

the decrease in extra-diegetic music in Antonioni’s films since 1960s, concentrates on the use of the musical soundtrack in *Cronaca di un amore* (*Chronicle of a Love*, 1950), and *Il grido* (*The Cry*, 1957).

¹⁵ Kahn and Whitehead, *Wireless Imagination*, 10.

¹⁶ Antonioni himself has often noted his attention to sound. See e.g. Betty Jeffries Demby and Larry Sturhahn, “*Professione: Reporter*” [interview with Antonioni, 1975], in Michelangelo Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere: Scritti sul cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venezia: Marsilio, 1994), 301, where he argues: “a film is image as well as sound. Which one is more important? I put them both on the same level.”

¹⁷ Michelangelo Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso” [1964], ed. François Maurin, in *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 251.

¹⁸ D’Amato, “Antonioni: la poetica dei materiali,” 154.

There is, in Antonioni, what we could call an “acoustic turn.” With *L’avventura* (1960), in fact, the soundtrack of his films changes quite radically. This turn, and the overarching interest in sound and phonographic technologies subsuming it, will be set against the wider artistic context of the period. I start by discussing the role and impact of novel recording technologies as a means for the representation of acoustic landscapes, and, through this, the manifestation of time and its passing. Changing the conditions of aurality, these technologies transformed the domain of sonority, promoting shifting redefinitions of the very notions of sound, noise, silence, music. Paradoxically, the drastic decrease of (extra-diegetic) musical accompaniment in Antonioni’s films since *L’avventura* can be illuminated by a discussion of experimentation in the field of music itself. Recording technology promoted the entry of environmental, prosaic sounds and noises into music, whether to regenerate it or disintegrate it as an autonomous category. Here, I draw in particular on the interest in such sounds on the part of the *musique concrète* movement and John Cage. This, I suggest, provides the context for Antonioni’s silencing of the musician and concomitant increased attention to “soundscape” in his films of the 1960s. In particular, Antonioni’s focus on acoustic landscapes in this period needs to be seen in the context of Cage’s ideas on silence and its sonority, and on the special relationship between silence and time.

In the second part of the chapter, in view of Antonioni’s actual staging of the tape recorder in *La notte* and *The Passenger*, I consider the appearance of sound technology itself as a subject, rather than simply an unseen means, of representation. What are the dynamics set in place by the actual portrayal of sound technology in visual media? In the scenes where it appears, Antonioni chooses to show the tape recorder as a tool for capturing the human voice. Shifting from acoustic landscapes

to the human voice, from the temporality of the outside world to the temporality of the self, the focus of the discussion becomes more intimate: the psychic register and subjectivity. When considered from the point of view of the storage of the voice, phonographic technologies' power to store time seems more poignantly and ineluctably always already haunted by absence, lack, death. Drawing also on Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), I consider how the *mise-en-abyme* of recording technology and the recording voice, allowing the paradoxical representation of different times visually coexisting, enables the visualization of a subject in thrall to time, "fractured" by temporality.

Finally, I conclude with a coda on an installation by Atom Egoyan at the Former Museum of Mankind in London in 2002, in which his film of Beckett's play (produced in 2000) is central.

Sound, Silence and Technology

Vertov's very succinct account of the sonic landscape surrounding him in a train station resonates in Antonioni's later, and more extensive description, of the "acoustic bath" to which he awakens one morning in New York:¹⁹

There is a background noise, incessant, hollow, dull: it's the traffic of the city. Then, another noise, less unbroken: the wind. It comes in gusts, but even during the pauses, one can hear it blow further away, against the skyscrapers.

Then the other noises. Intermittent, a very brief and faint siren. Two short toots on a horn. A receding dull rumble, which suddenly gets closer, but is immediately struck out by an abrupt, dry, irritated gust.

It's six o' clock in the morning.

Another roar couples with the first, eclipses it. A muted blast, far-off.

Surging up as if from nowhere, the wind comes back, swells and seems to expand more and more, but at a point, unexpectedly, stops. Again, a hint of a tram. No, it's not a tram, at last it becomes clear: it's a car. This other...it could be a motorbike, but too soon it turns into another indistinguishable noise. A truck, another truck accelerating. Two or three cars passing: the roads around Central Park bend going uphill. A series of car roars, petering away quickly. A moment of absolute void, which is almost frightening. A big lorry, extremely close, as if we were on the second floor, while we are at the thirty-seventh. But it drops immediately. A screech: impossible to say what it is. A ship siren, protracted, hoarse. Apparently there is no wind anymore. The siren continues. The background noise, below the siren. A bell toll: it sounds wrong, as if it hadn't come out well, clumsy. Maybe it's not a bell, but a blow struck on iron. Another one. Enraged intrusion of a car engine speeding up, very brief. The siren continues in the distance. It's emerging, just now, something like the echo of that metallic knock. But it must be something else. A very noisy lorry, seemingly driving up towards the window. But it's an aeroplane. All the noises now intensify: the horns, the siren even, then descend little by little. It's almost silence. But no: another roar, and then

¹⁹ Cf. Didier Anzieu's expression "sonorous bath" or "sound-bath." Didier Anzieu, "The Sound Envelope" [1976], in *The Skin Ego* [1985], trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 167.

again, louder, the siren. Irritating yet suggestive: it makes one feel the horizon.

It's quarter past six.²⁰

Dated "New York, April 1961," this "phonodiary" continues for several more paragraphs, its meticulously detailed chronicle punctuated here and there by the terse statement of the time, breaking the text into paragraphs.²¹ Covering a period of about three hours in the early morning, the text analyses the sounds of the quintessentially modern city: the rumble of rush-hour traffic resounding up to the thirty-seventh floor, the roar of aeroplanes cutting through the skyscrapers.

Antonioni's verbal description may strike us as redundant at a time when portable recording technology was becoming increasingly available. Yet the careful attention to the diapason of city traffic displayed in this text is itself indicative of the growth of recording technologies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In other words, Antonioni's subtle and punctilious account may be seen as the product of the very conditions which shape the experience of aurality in the "phonographic" age. Its enhanced discrimination of sounds denotes both a phonographic sensibility – an aesthetic shaped by the existence of sound reproduction technology – and a phonographic sensitivity – an ear whose perceptiveness has been trained on the model of the heightened receptiveness of the machine. Antonioni's focus is on the non- or extra-musical, on what Béla Balázs

²⁰ Notes by Michelangelo Antonioni, dated New York, April 1961. Published in: Carlo di Carlo, "Antonioni," in Carlo di Carlo, ed., *Michelangelo Antonioni* (Rome: Bianco e Nero, 1964), 29-31, footnote 11. Antonioni's text has later been published under the title "From a Thirty-seventh Floor over Central Park: Soundtrack for a Film in New York" [1961], in the collection of writings: Michelangelo Antonioni, *That Bowling Alley Down the Tiber* [1983], trans. William Arrowsmith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²¹ I borrow the term from D'Amato, "Antonioni: la poetica dei materiali," 177, footnote 8.

termed “the acoustic landscape in which we live,”²² and on what we could indeed describe as a typical “soundscape” of modernity. That is to say, Antonioni concentrates on that range of environmental sounds and noises that, having customarily come to provide the acoustic backdrop to everyday activities, often may go as unnoticed as to even pass for silence. His ear and pen, picking them up and transcribing them on paper, seem almost to imitate a recording machine: more sensitive yet, because automatic, unselective. “The phonograph,” Friedrich Kittler points out, “does not hear as do ears that have been trained immediately to filter voices, words, and sounds out of noise; it registers acoustic events as such.”²³

The thought of Antonioni’s ear as phonographic brings to mind Benjamin’s famous contention that “the mode of human sense perception” changes throughout history together “with humanity’s entire mode of existence.” “The manner in which human sense perception is organized,” Benjamin suggests, “the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.”²⁴ The development of representational technologies is for Benjamin, thinking in particular, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” of photography and sound film – high in the list of “historical circumstances” that contribute radically to re-organize sense perception in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Thomas Alva Edison, who, having invented the phonograph, also went on to develop cinematographic devices, including the kinetoscope and the kinetograph, is reported to have claimed:

²² Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* [1945], trans. from Hungarian edition of 1948 by Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970), 197.

²³ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 23.

In the year 1887, the idea occurred to me that it was possible to devise an instrument which should do for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear, and that by a combination of the two all motion and sound could be recorded and reproduced simultaneously.²⁵

In spite of several trials, such as the production of a kinetophonograph, which should have synchronized sounds to moving images, the faithfulness and simultaneity of aural and visual recording and reproduction Edison hoped for did not happen quite as early. Audiences, as Vertov's frustration reminds us, had to wait for another thirty years. Yet, if initially along separate lines, the diffusion of representational technologies has transformed the conditions of visibility and aurality from before, even, Edison's statement, and – as recent developments show – continues to do so. These changes, reshaping the experience of the visual and the aural, promote a re-organization of the very *domain* of the visible and the audible (of what, that is, *is* visible and audible), and categories therein.

Just as Benjamin argued that, by revealing an “optical unconscious,” hitherto invisible aspects of reality, photography and cinema transfigure the field of the visible, so Jean Epstein and Balázs saluted sound technology in the cinema as that which would reveal a hitherto aural unconscious. Sound technology, Epstein mused, could disclose an “acoustic dimension which the ear itself had not been accustomed to hear before.”²⁶

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” [1936], in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 216.

²⁵ W.K. L. Dickson and Antonia Dickson, *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kinetograph* [1895] (facsimile edition; New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 4.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, “A Small History of Photography” [1931], in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2000), 243. Jean Epstein, “Le Gros plan du son,” in *Écrits sur le cinéma 1921-1953*, ed. Pierre Leprohon, 2 vols., vol. 2: 1946-1953 (Paris: Seghers, 1975), 107 (my translation).

“The Future of Music”

For Epstein, Balázs and, rather less emphatically, for Benjamin, the advent of cinema sound had momentous consequences for aurality. Allowing the pairing of the previously invisible to the previously inaudible, it seemed to promise a sizeable extension of both sensorial domains. But where cinema sound spurred increased attention to ordinary noises, to the previously unknown or unnoticed sounds of “things,” rather than those of musical instruments, the reconfiguration of the domain of sonority also largely took place from within music itself, the art of sounds par excellence. In addition to transforming the way in which music was produced and consumed, auditive technologies promoted a radical reconfiguration of the very categories of music, sound, noise and silence. In fact, they rendered these categories’ respective boundaries remarkably malleable.

The Futurist Luigi Russolo with his *intonarumori*, a machine “to tune” noises, is exemplary of this elasticization of acoustic categories. As his manifestos and essays on the “art of noises” show, music could be rejuvenated, in Russolo’s view, through the use of non-musical sounds. These would be the sounds of modernity itself: “the noises of trams, of automobile engines, of carriages and brawling crowds.”²⁷ By “tuning” it, Russolo aimed to recuperate prosaic noise *as* music, re-defining both concepts in the process. The development of radio and cinema sound during the 1920s and 1930s further galvanised attempts to reform music through extra-musical sounds. After the war, these were rekindled and

facilitated by the diffusion of portable magnetic tape recording. In France, the *musique concrète* movement, founded by Pierre Schaeffer in 1948, aimed to create musical arrangements out of environmental, “natural” sounds, rather than orthodox instruments, much along the line of the Italian Futurists a few decades earlier. Thanks to portable recording technology (Schaeffer actually used phonographic equipment before switching to tape recorders), the sonority of the outside world could be brought “in,” and to music. Sounds such as those of the railway, that is, as in Schaeffer’s seminal work *Etude aux chemins de fer* (1948), could be “liberated” from their natural source and turned into manipulable “sound objects.”²⁸ As with Russolo’s “tuning,” Schaeffer’s aim was not the straight importation of common noises into music: he did not want to make music noise, but to make noise music, using recording technology to transfigure mundane sounds. As Douglas Kahn reports, not only did Schaeffer repudiate his *Etude* “soon after completion because the train station sounds remained too recognizable,” he eventually came to reject the whole *musique concrète* enterprise, saying that it “assembl[ed] sound...but not music.”²⁹ Indeed, both Russolo’s and the *musique concrète* composers are part of what John Cage has pointedly described as the “tendency [running] through the whole twentieth-century, from the Futurists on, to use noises, anything that produced sound, as a musical instrument” – of which, of course, Cage is himself a part.³⁰

But whereas for Schaeffer, plain, unmanipulated prosaic sounds were still *too* prosaic to count as music, Cage went further. For he proposed to expand the category

²⁷ Luigi Russolo, “The Art of Noises Futurist Manifesto” [1913], in *The Art of Noises* [1916], trans. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 25 (the original passage is in italics, which I have omitted).

²⁸ Schaeffer’s *Etude aux chemins de fer* is produced entirely by editing recordings of railway trains. See Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: The Avant-Garde Since 1945* (London: J. M Dent and Sons, 1981), 31-32.

²⁹ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 110. Kahn comments on, and quotes from an interview between Pierre Schaeffer and Tim Hodgkinson in *Re Records Quarterly Magazine* 2 (March 1987), 8.

³⁰ Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2003), 165.

of music to *all* sounds. “It wasn’t really a leap on my part,” Cage demurs “it was, rather, simply opening my ears to what was in the air.”³¹ On the one hand, this opening his ears “to what was in the air” meant becoming attuned to the artistic tendency of his century, following the direction in which the cultural wind blew: in short, make music out of noise. Yet, and with deeper implications, it also meant, quite literally, to tune in to “the air” surrounding him, and to all the sounds that may, or may not, be in it. Cage’s “delight”³² and pursuit of noises, in fact, is underscored by a more fundamental concern for silence: a concern that, far from being incompatible with attention to sound, is actually its premise. Because, for Cage, the more one listens in to silence, the more one *hears* it or, rather, realizes that she or he does not, and cannot, quite hear *it*.

Cage’s firm stance on silence, in fact, is that, in absolute terms, it does not exist. His most reported – by himself no less than others – pronouncement on the matter argues the point by narrating his experience of entering an anechoic chamber:

There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. For certain engineering purposes, it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber, its six walls made of special material, a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue after my death. One need not fear about the future of music.³³

As becomes clear from later explanations, the point of this anecdote is not so much that the body produces sounds by virtue of being alive. Rather, for Cage, the body in this respect is like the rest of matter: in a state of constant vibration and process, which, given the suitable techniques and technologies, we can be made to hear:

Look at this ashtray: it's in a state of vibration. We're sure of that, and the physicist can prove it to us. But we can't hear those vibrations. When I went into the anechoic chamber I could hear myself. Well, now, instead of listening to myself, I want to listen to this ashtray. But I won't strike it as I would a percussion instrument. I'm going to listen to its inner life thanks to a suitable technology....³⁴

The Futurists and the *musique concrète* composers, among others, had tried to import non-musical sounds into music. More radically, and from the premise that everything – even what one would commonly think of as silence – is sound, Cage advocates the equation of music with sound. “One need not fear about the future of music,” because, *always* (“until I die” and “after my death”), “there will be sounds.”³⁵ He propounds that the “future of music” lies in stretching the category to the point that there is nothing that is outside of it: “the entire field of sound” (which

³³ John Cage, “Experimental Music” [1957], in Cage, *Silence*, 8.

³⁴ John Cage, *For the Birds: In Conversation with Daniel Charles* [1976] (Boston: Maryon Boyars, 1981), 196.

includes the sonority of silence), just by existing, *is* music. For Cage, that is, the avant-garde tradition of noise *in* music to which he attunes himself bears the seeds for the annihilation of the very category, suggesting the possibility of substituting the term “music” itself with “a more meaningful term: organization of sound.”³⁶

Cage’s explanation that he won’t “strike” the ashtray, but “listen” to it with “a suitable technology,” just as the technology of the anechoic chamber had enabled him to listen to his own body, brings into relief an important aspect in Cage’s practice, and its rootedness in twentieth-century sonority. Indeed, it demonstrates the role sound technologies play in constructing, as well as disclosing, new aspects of aurality in modernity, providing the means with which to detect *and* create new sounds, including those of silence. For the ear Cage opened to the air was, indeed, not only often aided by technology, but also, like Antonioni’s ear in New York, already in itself phonographic.

The acoustic landscapes, the noises of everyday objects, the sounds big and small that Cage tunes in to are not only those of his historical moment. They are also those which the very *technology* of the historical moment attunes him to, providing the means for their pursuit, revelation, “organiz[ation], edit[ing]” (as Vertov would say) and, even, their moulding, transfiguration and generation. “The magnetic plate of tape,” argues Cage, has “handed to us” a whole new range of sounds, “in any combination and any continuity issuing from any point in space in any transformation.”³⁷ Therefore “current musical activities,” or what we have seen he may opt to call the “organization of sounds,” can consist of no other than “discovering and acting upon these new...resources” with these new technologies

³⁵ John Cage, “The Future of Music: Credo” [1958], in Cage, *Silence*, 8. A first version of this was delivered as a paper in 1937.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁷ John Cage, “Erik Satie” [1958], in Cage, *Silence*, 77.

themselves.³⁸ For Cage that is, as he had already explained in 1937, “the future of music” needs to be pursued with “twentieth-century means”: “oscillators, turntables, generators... film phonographs,” microphones, receivers, etc., as these technologies themselves are that which puts new sounds into the air.³⁹

Cage was excited about the opportunities afforded by tape recording, not only because “the sound materials available now through magnetic tape are virtually unlimited,” but also because, as he said to an audience of “creative” film-makers in 1956, “anything can be done.”⁴⁰ The thought that “[w]ith magnetic tape, the possibility exists to use the literature of music as material (cutting it up, transforming it, etc.); this is the best thing that could have happened to it.”⁴¹ Provocatively irreverent, Cage shows admiration for the innovative potential offered by magnetic tape, which allows the manipulation and recycling of past music as “material” to be cut up and spliced elsewhere. In his pursuit of impermanence and chance, Cage appreciated the extreme ease with which tape could be edited, and used to produce stochastic “DIY” sound collages and arrangements – as in his minutely spliced *Williams Mix* (1952).⁴² There is a touch of irony in the fact that, “fighting [...] the notion of art itself as something that we preserve,” and “promoting,” instead, “the notion of impermanen[ce],” Cage saw magnetic recording as an important ally.⁴³ But, in fact, he saw it as a means of storing something which was *less permanent*

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cage, “The Future of Music,” 5-6.

⁴⁰ John Cage, “On Film” [1956], in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage* (London: Allen Lane, 1971), 115. The speech was delivered to the Creative Film Foundation in New York City, 6 April 1956.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Cage describes the laborious process of physically making the piece by splicing tiny segments of magnetic tape in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 168-170. See also: James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90-91.

⁴³ Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 230.

than written notation: just like “sand painting,” “work with magnetic wires [...] can quickly and easily be erased, rubbed off.”⁴⁴

In the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Cage’s enthusiasm was shared by a number of other people, and not only musicians or artists, like the *musique concrète* composers, William Burroughs, Antonin Artaud, Yoko Ono, but also laypersons and amateurs. Walter Murch, the cinema sound designer who produced, among others, the soundtrack for that self-reflexive investigation of sound technologies which is Coppolas’s *The Conversation* (1974), recalls how, when he was a little boy in the early 1950s, magnetic tape fired his imagination. Before managing to convince his parents to buy him his own tape recorder for Christmas, he would regularly – with a variety of excuses – call round at a neighbour, who owned one, just in the off-chance that he may

be allowed to play with that miraculous machine: hanging the microphone out of the window and capturing the back-alley reverberations of Manhattan, Scotchtaping it to the shaft of a swing-arm lamp and rapping the bell-shaped shade with pencils, inserting it into one end of the vacuum cleaner tube...⁴⁵

Indeed, together with Cage and Schaeffer, the ten-year-old Murch “capturing the back-alley reverberations of Manhattan,” is part of the immediate historical and cultural background to Antonioni’s own record of New York noises. In its attention

⁴⁴ John Cage, “Forerunners of Modern Music” [1949], in Cage, *Silence*, 65.

⁴⁵ Walter Murch, “Preface” to Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* [1990], trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xiii. Indeed, in this preface to the English translation of Chion’s book, Murch tells of his early interest for *musique concrète*, noting the porosity between this and the field of cinema sound effects, xiii-xv. Chion is in his turn a *musique concrète* artist who has composed for film, as well as directing shorts and writing extensively on sound and cinema. See also: Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* [1982], trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

to environmental – and, more specifically, urban – sounds, Antonioni’s verbal account of an early morning in Manhattan speaks of the impact of magnetic tape recording, and of the heterogeneous flurry of experiments it encouraged, at least as much as it evokes the actual noises therein described.

Written shortly after the release of *La notte* (1961), Antonioni’s text on urban noise marks an acoustic turning point in his cinema. In fact, it signals a moment when, paradoxically, Antonioni’s films become *more silent*. From *L’avventura* (1960) onwards, there is a progressive diminution in the overall use of music in his films, as Giuseppe D’Amato’s diagram illustrates (ill. 18, p. 346). While *Red Desert* (1964) marks a peak – also because of the highly experimental character of the little music that *is* used – the films which follow, though not included in this graph, continue this trend, with the exception of the *sui generis* *Zabriskie Point* (1970).⁴⁶ The diagram also throws into relief Antonioni’s penchant, present early on in his career, for integrating the music *within* the narration. Rather than an external commentary to the story, Antonioni prefers the music to be part of the story, with its source (a radio, a record player, a live performance) in the diegetic space of the film. As he suggested in the course of an interview in 1965, he had actually “always been opposed to the ‘musical comment’ in the conventional sense, to the soporific function which is usually assigned to it.” “It’s the idea of ‘setting images to music’ that I don’t like,” he continues:

as if a film were an opera libretto. It’s something I reject, this urge to deny room to silence, to fill up alleged voids. It’s a necessity born with silent

⁴⁶ In its choice of contemporary pop music (though specifically commissioned), as opposed to a more conventionally cinematic “mood” or “themed” soundtrack, *Zabriskie Point* anticipates a tendency that will take root in cinema during the 1970s. (Antonioni had already introduced some pop music,

cinema, when the piano was used to cover the cranking noise of the projector, to create an atmosphere. All in all since then we've progressed very little."⁴⁷

In the earlier films, up to *Il grido* (*The Cry*, 1957), the music tended to be made up of more conventionally melodic "mood" tracks – mostly composed by Giovanni Fusco, whose collaborations with Antonioni dated back to the director's documentaries of the late 1940s. In the subsequent films, by contrast, the musical soundtrack changes in two ways. Not only is there a radical diminution of the amount of extra-diegetic music but also the character and density of the music that does remain is drastically different. It becomes more and more experimental, atonal, fragmentary, and certainly is not allowed to blossom into a musical "theme" for the narratives or the characters. With *L'avventura*, the contributions of Fusco – whose style, very different from that of the earlier films, testifies to the composer's flexibility – enter a descending curve, both in terms of "internal" volume and screen presence. On the one hand, as the number and range of instruments is gradually reduced (up to the unaccompanied singing voice of *Red Desert*), the pieces become more rarefied and economical, more like disarticulated and disjointed sounds which are not allowed to coalesce into a melody. On the other, the proportion, in minutes, of the total soundtrack they are allowed to take up is sizeably decreased, as Antonioni also introduces music by other composers. So, for example, there is the jazz of Giorgio Gaslini's quartet in *La notte*, which, performed diegetically, provides

diegetically, in *Blow-up*.) See: Alberto Boschi, " 'La musica che meglio si adatta alle immagini': suoni e rumori nel cinema di Antonioni," in *Le sonorità del visibile*, 87.

⁴⁷ Pierre Billard, "L'idea mi viene attraverso le immagini" [interview with Antonioni; 1965], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 134.

⁴⁷ For an in-depth analysis of Fusco's career overall, see: Roberto Calabretto, "Giovanni Fusco: musicista per il cinema di Antonioni," in *Le sonorità del visibile*.

the totality of the music in this film, or the sparse, and very avant-garde for the time, electronic montages of Vittorio Gelmetti in *Red Desert*.⁴⁸

The technological manipulation of “natural” sounds (as in *musique concrète*), if not, even, the creation of new, “artificial” sounds *out of* the technologies themselves (as in electronic music), may certainly have influenced the radical change of music style in Antonioni’s films of the 1960s. Yet it is not only – or in fact, not primarily – in the musical soundtrack as such that Antonioni’s receptivity to the experiments transfiguring the category of “music” is shown. For the drastic decrease in the overall amount of music, and in the quantity and the harmony of the extra-diegetic tunes in particular, is matched, as critics have noted, by a concomitant “valorization of the sonorous environment,” in which the narrative action takes place.⁴⁹ It is mainly here, in Antonioni’s attention to *soundscape*, that the period’s remapping of acoustic categories is manifested. The progressive introduction of quotidian sonorities into music at large may be what promoted the disintegration of the music in his cinema. Somewhat paradoxically, the mark of Antonioni’s interest – if not engagement – in the contemporary debates reconfiguring the field of music may lie in his decision to suppress the musical soundtrack in favour of an intensified rendition of the aural dimension of a given location or situation. After all, as Cage had noted, this gradual expansion *into* noise of the musical diapason suggested the possibility of equating music itself to “the entire field of sound,” of which the composer would become the organizer.⁵⁰ From this perspective, the figures of musician and cinema-sound designer start to resemble one another...

⁴⁸ In fact, Fusco’s part for *Red Desert*’s solo voice can also somewhat be seen as the composer’s swan song to Antonioni’s cinema, marking the end of his collaboration with the director.

⁴⁹ Boschi, “ ‘La musica che meglio si adatta alle immagini,’ ” 87.

⁵⁰ Cage, “The Future of Music,” 4-5.

Interviewed in 1960, Antonioni said he dreamt of “using only a soundtrack of noises” in his films. However, as he quickly pointed out, this seemed destined to remain a dream as – inevitably – he would have to reach a compromise with the divergent opinion of his producers, unwilling to back a film completely without music.⁵¹ The rarefaction of the music in *L'avventura* is counterbalanced by the striking acoustics of environmental sounds in the film – such as those of the sea and wind in the sequences shot in the Eolian Islands, off Sicily. And of course, for these, unlike Vertov, Antonioni had available portable magnetic-recording equipment, a selection of sensitive microphones and amplifiers, as well as the possibility to “organize, edit” as he pleased. In a 1960 interview, he enthusiastically explains how for the marine sequences:

I got the sound engineers to record a huge quantity of sound effects: every possible type of sea, from smooth to choppy to very rough, the rumble of the waves as they break against the rocks, and so on. I had at my disposal over a hundred reels, only for the sound effects. Then I selected those that now constitute the soundtrack of the film. To me, this is the music that best fits the images. It's rare for music to really fuse with the images, generally it is used to stupefy the spectator, to obfuscate the sharpness of his vision. [...]

The ideal would be to compose, exclusively with noises, a beautiful soundtrack, and to get an orchestra director to conduct it.... Even though, perhaps, in the end the only one able to conduct it would be the director himself.⁵²

⁵¹ “Questions à Antonioni,” *Positif* 30 (July 1959), 7-10. 10 cited (my translation).

It certainly testifies to the porosity between the sonic and the visual arts and media in the twentieth century that, more or less at the same time in which Antonioni jokingly fancied himself as a “musician,” Cage was trying himself out as a sound-effects engineer. Less than a year before Antonioni, selecting tape recordings of the Sicilian sea, got down to composing his symphony of noises, Cage too was absorbed by aquatic sounds and tapes. In fact, between 1958 and 1959, at the end of his fourth European “grand tour,” Cage was in Milan, spending a few months at the studio which the Italian experimental musicians Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna had set up at a local radio station in 1955. The Studio di Fonologia aimed to fuse the compositional tenets of the *musique-concrète* group, which favoured recorded natural sounds, with those of the electronic music laboratory of Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose initial idea was to create sounds exclusively through recording technology itself.⁵³ What is more curious, however, is that Cage performed some of the pieces he produced during this sojourn in an unlikely, yet hugely popular, venue. Bizarrely, for five weeks Cage participated in the television quiz-show *Lascia o Raddoppia* – a not-to-be-missed weekly appointment for millions of Italians throughout the 1950s and 1960s, whose host, now in his eighties, has been conducting variations of it ever since – as a mushroom expert (winning a jackpot of \$ 6,000!).⁵⁴ In the course of the show, in addition to the older *Amores* (1943), Cage premiered *Water Walk* and *Sounds of Venice* (both 1959), which included material from *Fontana Mix* (1958), a work based on chance cutting and editing of magnetic

⁵² André S. Labarthe, “All’origine del cinema c’è una scelta” [interview with Antonioni; 1960], in Antonioni, *Fare un film*, 127.

⁵³ On Cage in Europe, and on his relation to Europe, see Christopher Shultis, “Cage and Europe,” in David Nicholls, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On the experimental laboratories of Berio, Maderna and Stockhausen, see e.g. Chanan, *Repeated Takes*, 142.

⁵⁴ Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, 39–40. For discussions of Italian television broadcasting and the popularity of *Lascia o Raddoppia*, see: David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880–1980: Cultural Industries, Politics and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), esp. 24 and 126.

tape recordings he produced at the Studio di Fonologia. *Water Walk* and *Sounds of Venice* involved playing single-track magnetic tapes, and producing sounds with an array of objects relating, respectively, to water in general, and to the peculiarly aquatic dimension of Venice's sonorous landscape. (ill. 19, p. 347).⁵⁵

Moving in intellectual and artistic milieux, and being particularly attracted to and knowledgeable about the anglophone arts circuit in particular, Antonioni certainly did not need to hear, or hear about, Cage's performances at *Lascia o Raddoppia* in order to be introduced to the experimentations of the American composer.⁵⁶ If an echo of Cage's ideas may have already been present in Antonioni's earlier films, Cage's strategies to make objects "speak", in their turn, owe something to cinema itself. Amidst his idiosyncratic concoction of objects for the première of *Water Walk*, Cage looks a bit like a Foley artist performing sound effects for an invisible, or non-existent, film.⁵⁷ And, indeed, in his "Credo" on "The Future of Music" Cage praises the film phonograph for the control it affords over sounds' amplitude, frequency and rhythm. "Given four film phonographs," he writes there, "we can compose and perform a quartet for explosive motor, wind, heartbeat and landslide."⁵⁸ As Cage elsewhere recalls, he was in fact led to percussion via a seminal meeting with Oskar Fischinger, who, in the 1930s, was experimenting with

⁵⁵ Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 113-114. See also: André Chaudron, "John Cage Database": <http://www.johncage.info/workscage/fontana.html>; <http://www.johncage.info/workscage/soundsvenice.html>; <http://www.johncage.info/workscage/waterwalk.html> Accessed 18 November 2004.

⁵⁶ As I have mentioned in the Introduction, Antonioni followed the American art scene. See e.g. Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), esp. 54; Jean-Luc Godard, "La notte, L'eclisse...l'aurora" [interview with Antonioni, 1964] and Giorgio Tinazzi, "L'esperienza americana" [interview with Antonioni, 1969], both in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, esp. 259 and 278-79 respectively. Furthermore, both Gelmetti and Antonioni had links with the circuit of Italian experimental cinema, with which Cage himself was briefly involved. See: Bruno di Marino, *Sguardo inconscio azione: cinema sperimentale e underground a Roma 1965-75* (Rome: Lithos, 1999), esp. 35 and 48.

⁵⁷ Cinema composer Franco Mannino, in *Visconti e la musica* (Lucca: Akademos and Lim, 1994), recounts how Cage good-humouredly accepted Mannino's remark that *musique concrète* had not been "invented" by experimental musicians like Cage himself, but cinema sound-effects technicians and composers, 5.

the graphic notation of sounds on film, and talked to him of releasing the (sonorous) “spirit” inside objects.⁵⁹ In what we may call the Cagean traits of Antonioni’s take on sonority, it is less a matter of Cage the individual artist than of the wider cultural and artistic movement he stands for. As the self-effacing Cage describes his actual listening to “air,” and sounds thereof, as simply being receptive to contemporary trends, so an Antonioni-Cage nexus needs to be considered in the historical exchanges between the sonic and the visual arts during the period.⁶⁰ This notwithstanding, it is tantalizing to note that Cage’s echo gets significantly louder just after the composer’s stay in Italy, when, in fact, Antonioni’s cinema, with the acoustic turning point of *L’avventura*, becomes more silent. It is with this film that, overall volume and internal density of the musical accompaniment drastically reduced, Antonioni starts to focus on the narrative “soundscapes,” strikingly also giving “room to silence.”⁶¹ This “silence,” however, his cinematic work discovers and reveals as already full of sonority, since silences, for Antonioni, as for Cage, are “voids” only “alleged[ly].”⁶²

⁵⁸ Cage, “The Future of Music,” 3.

⁵⁹ “When I was introduced to him,” Cage explains, “he began to talk with me about the spirit which is inside each of the objects of this world. So, he told me, all we need to do to liberate that spirit is to brush past the object, and to draw forth its sound. That’s the idea which lead me to percussion. In all the many years that followed up to the war, I never stopped touching things, making them sound and resound, to discover what sound they could produce. Wherever I went, I always listened to objects.” Cage, *For the Birds*, 73-74. This is discussed by Kahn, in *Noise, Water, Meat*, 196-197.

⁶⁰ For a history of sound in twentieth-century arts, see the already cited: Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, and Kahn and Whitehead, *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*. See also Shaw-Milller, *Visible Deeds of Music*. For analyses of the relation between cinema and sound, see, among others: Weis and Belton, *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*; Rick Altman, ed., *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992); Chion, *The Voice in the Cinema*; Chion, *Audio Vision*; James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Paola Valentini, “La ricezione della rivoluzione sonora in Italia,” *Bianco e Nero* 62 (May/June 2001), 5-17.

⁶¹ Pierre Billard, “L’idea mi viene attraverso le immagini” [interview with Antonioni; 1965], 134.

Sonic immersions

We have seen how, for Cage, “there is no such thing as an absolute silence.”⁶³ Since matter is in a process of continuous vibration, for Cage any situation normally thought of as “silent” is always already full of sonority. But the sounds of silence, for Cage, are not just the humanly imperceptible or the barely audible, like the voice of the ashtray, the buzzing of the nervous system or the beat of circulating blood. The sonority of silence is also composed of perfectly audible, loud or soft sounds, which, however, because they have become banal and everyday, we do not notice any more. “Water,” Cage has commented on the pieces he presented at *Lascia o Raddoppia*, “was a useful thing to concentrate on,” precisely because of its “banal[ity].”⁶⁴ Indeed, these performances put into relief Cage’s interest in ordinary sonority, in all those sounds which one may even not hear any more and hence pass as “silence”: environmental noises, produced by everyday, modern, objects (an electric mixer, a pressure cooker, radios, boat horns, etc.). “Silence,” he argues:

is all of the sound we don’t intend. [...] Therefore silence may well include loud sounds and more and more in the twentieth century does. The sounds of jet planes, of sirens, et cetera.⁶⁵

For Cage, that is, from the heartbeat to the jet plane, our exposure to sound is unavoidable. But where we are “open” to it because of our very own physiology – the body cannot block it out – our exposure is also greater in modernity, where sounds are simply, in Cage’s view, more abundant and louder.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Michael Zwerin, “A Lethal Measurement” [interview with Cage; 1966] in Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, 166.

⁶⁴ Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 113.

For all his attempts to prove that silence does not exist, to make us “listen to [the] inner life” of “the ashtray,” Cage relies not only on cultural and technological amplification of apparent silences, but also, paradoxically, on a concomitant form of silence itself. The complementary flipside of Cagean amplifications, as Douglas Kahn has noted, is “silencing.”⁶⁶ The most clamorous demonstration of this is Cage’s famous 4’33’’, also known as *silent piece*. When it was premiered in 1952 in New York, David Tudor, the performer, came on stage and sat at the piano without playing, timing himself with a watch for the duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Here, the resulting cultural amplification of the silence of the audience, revealing its sonority - coughs, laughs, shuffles, mutters, etc. - is dependent on the silencing of the musician.⁶⁷

It is a similar operation that, in many respects, is at work in Antonioni’s films from *L’avventura* onwards. As with Cage, with Antonioni, too, making silence, or the otherwise imperceptible or neglected sounds of silence audible, is not simply a matter of listening to “what [is] in the air,” but relies, in its turn, on selective silencing as well as amplification.⁶⁸ A certain type of silence becomes sonorous because something is being abated while something else is boosted. The partial silencing of the musical soundtrack – and, often, of the actors’ dialogues – is a prerequisite for the valorization of the sonic landscape, indeed, for the sonorization of its silence, whether absolute silence is considered an actual possibility or not. As with the silencing of the musician in *silent piece*, Antonioni’s abatement is already a form of cultural amplification. It stakes out a zone for the *audience* to prick up their ears and tune in to: anything within that zone will be not simply heard, but listened

⁶⁵ Zwerin, “A Lethal Measurement,” 166.

⁶⁶ For this discussion see: Kahn, “*Noise, Water, Meat*, chapter 6 on “John Cage: Silence and Silencing.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

to. Unlike Cage, it is neither, self-reflexively, the sonorous silence of the cinema audience Antonioni wants to attract attention to, nor the cranking of the projector, but the acoustic landscape of the cinematic narrative – whose sounds, noises and silences are henceforth valorized. It is here, in this carefully demarcated and culturally amplified cinematic zone, that – as it does for Cage – technology also comes to the aid of Antonioni.

Like the camera eye, the ear of the phonograph (and of its re-incarnations in subsequent sound recording machines) is seen to imitate, and often surpass, the ability of the human organ. The history of technology is dotted with comparisons to the human senses and faculties, with the machines variously being presented as inferior copies, enhancing prostheses, or even superior models of their human counterparts.⁶⁹ Whether enthusiastic or critical, the comparison usually hinges on what are taken to be the distinctive traits of the mechanical: unselective automation and sensitivity. Phonography, and sound recording and/or reproduction technologies more widely, including telephony and radiophony, are no exception.⁷⁰ In fact, the dynamics of these comparisons are effectively illuminated by the inventor of the phonograph himself, Edison, when he reverses the ear metaphor from the

⁶⁸ Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 165.

⁶⁹ Just two examples among many could be: Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” [1930], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 24 vols., vol. 21 (London: Vintage, 2001), and Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). Freud famously suggests that technological inventions, from “the photographic camera” to “the gramophone disc” are like “auxiliary organs,” thanks to which “man has, as it were, become like a kind of prosthetic God.” “[B]ut those organs have not grown on him and still give him much trouble at times” (91-92). For a discussion of technology as prosthesis, see: Tim Armstrong, *Modernsim, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. chapter 3.

⁷⁰ As Jonathan Sterne observes, even though sound recording and/or reproduction apparatuses, from the phonograph to the telephone and radio, may often be thought of as “talking” – and indeed the phonograph was referred to as such when it first appeared – they actually are “hearing machines.” The model on which they still function (through microphones and amplifiers), and on which the first prototypes were built, is the human ear and its tympanic function. The forerunner of the phonograph, Alexander Graham Bell’s and Clarence Blake’s phonoautograph (1874), was actually constructed with an excised human ear. See: Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound*

phonograph back to his own, partially deaf, ears. “I am like a phonograph,” he explains:

My ears, being a little deaf, seem to catch all the useless noises more readily than the musical tones, just as the phonograph exaggerates all the faults of a singer.... From a mechanical point of view, music is in pretty bad shape.⁷¹

Here, with an evocative inversion, Edison likens his own (impaired) human ears to the mechanical sensitivity of the phonographic apparatus, which automatically records and amplifies anything, anywhere, without discrimination between “music” and “noise,” intentional or unintentional, significant or insignificant sounds. Paradoxically, it is by virtue of being faulty that the human faculty is able to catch up with the machine. And it is precisely this enhanced sensitivity and indiscriminate automatism of the mechanical – from whose point of view, as Edison argued, music, or all that is intentional and meaningful sound, “is in pretty bad shape” – that Antonioni appreciates in sound technology:

Most professional microphones are much more sensitive than the human ear, and often a soundtrack obtained through direct recording is enriched by thousands of unforeseen noises and sounds.⁷²

Writing at about the same time, in 1964, he praises these same qualities in visual technology too, enthusing that perhaps, on exposure, “film stock registers

Reproduction (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), esp. chapter 1. See also: Chanan, *Repeated Takes*.

⁷¹ Quoted in Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema*, 87, from: Paul J. Morris, “Making Music More Musical,” *Musician* 21 (1916).

everything...like an American military device of recent invention,” and that “only our technological backwardness prevents us from revealing all that is [imprinted] on the film frame.”⁷³ As camera technology transforms visibility by initiating us into what Benjamin called the “optical unconscious,” so sound technologies transfigure aurality by rendering audible usually unnoticed or imperceptible sonorities, and by giving a voice to silence, whether mute, whispering, or loud. The means by which they can make audible the previously inaudible is not simply amplification, but, crucially, the capacity for collecting and storing sounds. Indeed, the clear advantage of technology over the human ear (even the phonographic one Antonioni displays in his account of New York’s acoustic landscape) is that technology can store the audible, so that it does not simply, irretrievably – as Vertov said – “rush past, like time.”⁷⁴ Sounds, Antonioni emphasizes, are “*collected* by the microphone.”⁷⁵ The “thousands of unforeseen noises and sounds” by which direct recording is “enriched,” are not so much heard during the act itself, as noticed afterwards, on playback. In fact, it is in post-production that they become particularly precious. For then it becomes evident just how crucial to the sonority of a given situation are all those sounds that, normally unnoticed, may even be considered below the threshold of the audible. Paradoxically, as Antonioni suggests, it may largely be on these that a soundscape’s constitutive traits, its distinctive “features,” depend:

⁷² Billard, “L’idea mi viene attraverso le immagini,” 132.

⁷³ Michelangelo Antonioni, *Sei film* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964), xiv.

⁷⁴ Vertov, “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” 40.

⁷⁵ Billard, “L’idea mi viene attraverso le immagini,” 132-133. The microphone was at the outset called “pick-up.” See: Chanan, *Repeated Takes*, 67.

When I can I prefer direct recording. Sounds, noises and natural voices collected by the microphone have a power of suggestion which is not possible to obtain with post-synchronization.⁷⁶

Yet, just as the frustrated Vertov valued “editing” and “organizing” on the same level as “recording,” so Antonioni’s cinematic rendering of the “audible world” does not entail a naturalistic aesthetic. When, in the course of the 1960s, Antonioni increasingly tunes in to the acoustic landscape, preferring, as he says, direct recording where possible, he does not perceive this as incompatible with making full use of the possibilities for manipulation and transfiguration offered by the technology. In the same paragraph, in fact, he adds:

I believe that sometimes the transformation of a noise or a sound is indispensable in order to obtain specific effects. In the same way, in some cases it is necessary to alter the human voice.⁷⁷

The transformation of noises and the alteration of the human voice through technology are not, for Antonioni, at odds with his aim to express “the reality of our time” in his films.⁷⁸ This is partly because, as Benjamin argues, technology is itself already part of our modern reality, whose experience is not only transformed by technology but also *formed* through it.⁷⁹ The means for representing an acoustic or visual experience are themselves (part of) the experience, to the point that, like Antonioni in his New York text, we may perceive sounds, noises, or indeed the

⁷⁶ Billard, “L’idea mi viene attraverso le immagini,” 132-133.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 251.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 216.

sonority of silence, somewhat phonographically. Indeed, just as photography might have made *us* see photographically, and cinema “cinematized” our vision, so our hearing might have been “transformed” by sound technology.

In *Red Desert*, Antonioni offers an extreme example of this in the character of the neurotic Giuliana, all of whose senses have been profoundly affected by the mechanization of reality. It is precisely this that has caused her condition, constituting her – all too real – “nightmare.” For, as an early scene concisely suggests, the nightmare that disturbs her sleep turns out to have a physical cause in reality. Her bad dream, in fact, is provoked by her son’s toy-robot moving back and forth in the adjacent room, hitting the wall repeatedly. Meanwhile, from the uncoordinated dangling of her arms when she runs, to the lifeless slumping pose to which she abandons herself when sitting, Giuliana herself behaves remarkably like an automaton. But what is particularly of interest in this context is that she has almost herself become a sound recording machine. Similarly to Edison, whose partially deaf ears unselectively catch all the white noise spoiling a music recording, she seems to pick up sounds other people do not hear – perhaps vibrations of matter, collisions of particles in the airwaves. Presented as disturbances to a meaningful acoustic environment (i.e. conversation, humanly perceptible landscape noises), these are the sounds for which Antonioni employed Gelmetti’s electronic music. “The sonic impressions perceived by Giuliana,” explains Antonioni, “correspond” to the technological “transfiguration of real noises” we find in electronic music.⁸⁰ Giuliana’s hearing, in a way, is homologous with the way in which technology records and transforms sounds.

⁸⁰ Antonioni, “Il deserto rosso,” 253.

Whilst reaching a turning point with *L'avventura*, Antonioni's attention to environmental sonority is enhanced and radicalized in *La notte* (1961). In this film Antonioni even introduces a self-reflexive commentary on the capture of "soundscape" through technology, by having one of the characters, Valentina, produce an aural equivalent of his text on New York noises. At one point in the film, in fact, we are made to listen to an extract of the diary of sounds, the "phonodiary," Valentina keeps on her magnetic tape recorder.⁸¹ A sequence shows her dragging her portable – yet not quite *so* portable – tape recorder into the middle of the room. As she switches it on, we hear her recorded voice, describing what she herself defines as the "sonic landscape" around her:

Today, from the living room, I heard snatches of dialogue of a film shown on television. "Follow that car!", "Some more whiskey?", "If I were you, Jim, I wouldn't do it." After this line... the howling of a dog: sustained, sincere, perfect. It rose and then fizzled out, its sound tracing a trajectory of pain into the air.... Then, at first I thought I'd heard an aeroplane...but it was silence. And I was very happy about it. The park is full of silence made of noises. If you press your ear against a tree, and stay like this for a while, eventually you hear a noise. Maybe it depends on us, but I prefer to think that it's the tree.... Then, in that silence, all in a sudden, some strange bangs, disturbing the sonic landscape around me.⁸²

At first, it may strike us as odd that Valentina should decide to produce an a-posteriori monologue describing her surrounding soundscape, rather than

⁸¹ See: D'Amato, "Antonioni: la poetica dei materiali," 177.

reproducing the sounds themselves *as they happen*. Though the relative bulkiness of the recorder, and the limited sensitivity of the microphone, may serve as partial explanations, both the narrative and the meta-narrative motivation for this choice become clearer as her recorded account progresses:

...I didn't want to hear them. I shut the window but the noise persisted, driving me mad. I wouldn't want to hear useless sounds, I'd like to be able to select them throughout the day...and to select voices and words.... Oh, so many words I'd rather not listen to...but you can't avoid them, you're subjected to them and can only try to endure them, like you ride the waves you're exposed to when you float in the sea...⁸³

While putting in the frame the portable tape recorder, Antonioni does not seem too concerned to show off its conquest of the outdoors. This happens, for example, in the contemporary *La dolce vita* (1960), where the guests at the party of the intellectual and socialite Steiner are entertained and fascinated by a recording of outdoor natural sounds (birds, water, wind) played off a visibly displayed machine. Rather, Antonioni uses Valentina's recorded monologue to embed within the cinematic narrative a "manifesto" of the acoustic strategy adopted in the film as a whole, and, indeed, in his films of the period.

Angela Dalle Vacche, discussing the use of colour in *Red Desert*, has talked of Antonioni's "visual ventriloquism." She coins the expression on the basis of Pier Paolo Pasolini's interpretation of the "look" of the film as portraying Giuliana's vision of reality, which he calls the cinematic use of the "free indirect point-of-view"

⁸² From *La notte*, my translation.

and sees as a director's expedient to channel his own view through his character's eyes.⁸⁴ Valentina's taped monologue is perhaps a more straightforward case of aural ventriloquism: through her voice Antonioni speaks his aesthetic intentions and concerns. Valentina's poetic phonodiarly elucidates the practice adopted for the soundtrack of *La notte* itself: the attention to acoustic landscape and to the ordinary and everyday noises of modernity (such as the snatches of what sounds like a Hollywood film dialogue on television, with the related allusion to the Americanization of Italian life), including the murmur of silence (the roar of an aeroplane resembles silence to Valentina's ears). In fact, through Valentina, Antonioni also exposes a more general reflection on his conception of sonority. Indeed, we could say that Valentina's recorded voice, which, in its turn, sounds quite Cagean, echoes throughout Antonioni's writings – such as the New York phonodiarly – and interviews of the period. As Antonioni describes his unavoidable immersion – even from inside his hotel room – in the outdoor sounds of New York traffic, so, for Valentina, we are immersed in sound as we are immersed in water when swimming. Sound is pervasive and persistent, and we are as unavoidably exposed to it as we are to waves in the sea. The Cagean ring of this idea of an inescapable bath of sound – sound always and everywhere – is even more direct in Valentina's comments on the sonority of silence. Here, as for Cage, sound emerges as a condition of experience, *even* of the experience of silence: "The park is full of silence made of noises," says Valentina, a few years before Antonioni explicates in an interview that a silence is not a "void."⁸⁵ But the pervasiveness of sound may be intrinsically threatening. If,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Angela Dalle Vacche, "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*. Painting as Ventriloquism and Colour as Movement," in her book *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), esp. 48-49. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The 'Cinema of Poetry'" [1965], in *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), esp. 178-79.

⁸⁵ Billard, "L'idea mi viene attraverso le immagini," 134.

like phonographic machines, we cannot select what we hear, the danger of noise pollution looms – and Valentina’s view in this respect seems bleak (even though, unlike machines, we are often able to choose what to listen to). It may be possible that, at some level, Valentina’s sense of powerlessness at shutting out what disturbs her belies an anxiety on Antonioni’s part towards the sonic bombardment of modern life. What it certainly, implicitly, reveals, is the flip side of Antonioni’s cinematic pursuit of “soundscape”: whilst it is a matter of valorizing certain sounds, it is also a matter of abating, or trying to abate, others.

Some of what will become Antonioni’s concerns had been anticipated by Balázs, who, in 1945, wrote that the “business” of film sound should be:

to reveal for us our acoustic environment, the acoustic landscape in which we live, the speech of things and the intimate whisperings of nature; all that has speech beyond human speech [...] from the muttering of the sea to the din of a great city.⁸⁶

In the passage from *L’avventura* to *La notte*, it is “from the muttering of the sea to the din of a great city” that Antonioni moves. Where the former film was set in the marine, rural and provincial environments of Sicily and adjacent islands, the latter is set in Milan, the slick and affluent metropolis of the industrialized North. As in the earlier film, Antonioni’s characters are still the bored upper-middle classes. Yet, *L’avventura* situated them out of their milieu, in search of adventure and diversion in a supposedly benignly “exotic” land – which turns out to be indecipherably and sinisterly alien in the course of the film. By contrast, *La notte* observes them in their

⁸⁶ Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 197.

own architectural and social surroundings: the skyscrapers of Milan's business district, the buzz of traffic, the jazz and chattering of voguish night bars and jet-set parties.

Where Valentina's recorded monologue counts as a *mise-en-abyme* statement of intent, in the rest of *La notte* – more radically than in *L'avventura*, where narrative soundscape is sometimes covered by extra-diegetic music – we can actually experience in action Antonioni's strategy of pursuing the acoustic environment of the narrative. As already noted, in *La notte*, the percentage of soundtrack dedicated to music is higher than in the longer *L'avventura*. Yet, by contrast to the earlier film, the whole of the music (performed by Gaslini's jazz quartet) is embedded in the filmic action, with the exception of that of the opening credits sequence.

It appears as the live accompaniment to both the night-club and the grand party in the villa of a rich Milanese industrialist which the protagonists attend in the course of the twenty-four hour period whose "night" – literally and metaphorically – gives the film its title. But if the music in the film is part of the acoustic environment, indeed qualifying as fashionably modern the Milan in which its characters move, Antonioni's attention to the urban soundscape is also emphatically dedicated to its specific noises and sounds – and, of course, to its "apparent" silences. Not surprisingly, these stand out with particular relief or, I should say, can be heard most vividly, in the long, almost dialogue-less sequence towards the beginning of the film. In this apparently "silent" scene, in which Lidia wanders aimlessly from the city centre to the outskirts, the insistent and subsistent sounds of the metropolis are brought, so to speak, to the surface. From its incessant, but perhaps often unnoticed murmur, to its most obviously loud and disruptive noises, this sequence brings into

relief what, in a different context, J.G. Ballard once described as “the cacophonous *musique concrète* of civilization.”⁸⁷

The silence of this sequence is impregnated by the same kind of sonority of which Antonioni becomes aware in his New York hotel room when he puts his pen, as well as its ears, to it. As the camera follows Lidia from the core of the city to its periphery, the soundtrack describes and organizes a plethora of sounds characteristic of modern experience. The buzzing noises of the business centre – cars, motorbikes, horns and voices in the crowds – give way to relative quietness as she walks through working-class and industrial districts. Here, in the absence of the incessant murmur of heavy traffic, a few sounds stand out more distinctly, almost amplified: church bells, an aeroplane crashing the sound barrier, a factory siren announcing the end of a shift. As, having taken a taxi, Lidia reaches the semi-rural outer edges of town, the soundscape changes yet again. Here, unlike earlier in the day in the city centre, car noises fade muffled into the background, while relaxed leisurely voices stand out more clearly – it is even possible to catch snippets of conversation – and mellow music can be heard from a radio in a bar kiosk.

As Lidia’s stroll lasts from midday to early evening, from the peak of business hours to the unwinding at the end of the working day, the sounds here are indexes not simply of modernity but also of time. The changing sonority inscribes and punctuates the changing time of the day. More specifically, these urban sounds (from the factory siren to the modulation of the traffic) signpost temporality in modernity: they are indicators of the regimentation and scansion of the working day in the metropolis. Through these sounds, a temporality of routine and everydayness is evoked. But not only: modernity *itself* is described in temporal terms, presented as

⁸⁷ G.J. Ballard, “The Sound-Sweep”[1960], in *The Voices of Time* (London: Phoenix, 1992), 62.

a set of temporal relations. The changing soundscapes inscribe a temporal element into Lidia's spatial movement: her journey from centre to periphery is also a journey through different time zones. She moves from the "now" and "new" of the business district, to the "then" and "old" of the semi-rural outskirts. Indeed, this is also visually rendered by markers of obsolescence and time past which punctuate her journey out of town, attracting her attention: a broken clock which she picks up and peruses in a scrapyard, a frail and hunched elderly woman she crosses on the pavement. Her journey takes her, figuratively, back in time, in terms of both collective and personal history. If the urban core of the city is in the time zone of modernity and the new, its outer edges are in a more heterogeneous one, still suffused with the time of the old, of a pre-industrial past. Here, among other things, by contrast with the unification of the language brought by national television in the post-war period, people can still be heard speaking their own regional dialect. In fact, its time zone is perhaps gradually losing its link with modernity, being cut off from the present: Lidia will notice the disused railtracks, covered with weeds, that were still functioning when she and her now husband used to go there in their dating days.

In this sequence then, sounds – temporal structures, structures that take time – are employed to articulate time itself *in* its passing. An inextricable relation between time and sound is evoked and dramatized. The notion that sound takes time suggests here that the opposite may also apply. For the scene takes – uses – sound as a medium through which time is, as it were, materialized, or embodied. Furthermore, sounds contribute to embed temporality in the cinematic image as such. But before we can discuss the articulation of time *through* sound in the cinema, we need to consider, briefly, the relation between time and sonority.

Time and the Sound of Silence

“Of Bergsonism,” Gaston Bachelard declared in *The Dialectic of Duration* (1936), “we accept everything but continuity.”⁸⁸ This was a provocative way of saying that he accepted next to nothing of it. Effectively, to set out to “break up” (in Bachelard’s own expression) the continuity of duration postulated by Bergson was tantamount to turning Bergsonism itself on its head.⁸⁹ As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, he had already essayed this project in an earlier work, entitled “The Instant” (1932). Here, Bachelard pitted Bergson’s “philosophy of duration” against the “philosophy of the instant” of Gaston Roupnel (a colleague of Bachelard’s at the University of Dijon), proposing that the former could be redressed by taking account of the latter.⁹⁰

Whether these terms are reconciled in a dialectic (as in Bachelard), or one is refuted in favour of the other (as in Bergson), the instant and duration appear to be inescapable basic elements in the thought of time. The “thinkability” of time seems indeed to depend on this very polarity between the protracted and the instantaneous, the “extensive” and the “intensive”; between, in short, the line and the point. And certainly the potential for disruption that each has on the other testifies, since and before Zeno’s paradoxes, to the intrinsic difficulty of thinking, or “imaging,” time.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration* [1936], trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 28. I have relied here on Cristina Chimisso’s discussion in the introduction, 1–13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁰ Gaston Bachelard, “The Instant” [1932], trans. Mary McAllester Jones, in Robin Durie, ed., *Time and the Instant: Essays in the Physics and Philosophy of Time* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 66. See footnote 2, page 93, for translator’s note on Gaston Roupnel.

⁹¹ Cf. Robin Durie, “The Strange Nature of the Instant,” in Durie, *Time and the Instant*, 1–24.

Where a photograph is often deemed to give us a “snapshot” of time, a frozen instant, we can’t hear a “snapshot” of sound in quite the same way. Certainly, the idea of the photograph as the embodiment of an instant plucked out of duration, of ongoing time, raises the question of the duration *of* the instant as such. For, indeed, even the “instant” required to press the camera shutter might in itself be durational (it may, that is, be a stretch of time we can measure). However, and at a more obvious level, sound conveys the durational aspect of time more straightforwardly. However brief, a sound has duration in that it unfolds in time, in a succession of instants. For Cage, duration is the very basis of sonority. He derives this idea from “music” as it is commonly understood, in which silence is distinct from sounds, even as *both* form part of it, as when instruments are paused rather than played:

Silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony: it is heard in terms of time length. There is no music that doesn’t structure itself from the very roots of sound and silence – lengths of time.⁹²

While, as he explains elsewhere, “a sound has four characteristics: frequency, amplitude, timbre and duration,” “silence only has duration. A zero musical structure must be just an empty time.”⁹³ However, as we saw, we can talk of “an empty time” only conventionally – as for an intended pause within a musical composition – because, in Cage’s view, absolute silence is actually impossible. Any silence, in fact, is already sonorous, inevitably full of non-composed sounds: accidental like that of

⁹² John Cage, “Defence of Satie” [1948], in Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, 81-82.

⁹³ John Cage, “Erik Satie” [1958], in Cage, *Silence*, 80.

the aeroplane in the sky, “breaking into” our soundscape, or involuntary and constant like that of our very own heartbeat.

Where the silencing of the musician in 4’33’’ discloses the sounds of silence, it does so by also revealing what for Cage is the fundamental point about sonority in general: its inextricable relation to time. From its very title – a precise length of time–, and its alternative name – *silent piece* –, 4’33’’ proposes silence as a temporal structure, as something which, because it *is* sound, takes time. While in traditional terms we can think of a pause as an empty time, in real terms, for Cage, “[t]here is no such a thing ... as an empty time [since] there is always something ... to hear.”⁹⁴ The use of the words “thing” and “something” is important: it is *thingness* that draws together time and sound. Cage, for whom matter is vibrations, sees sound as the “something,” the material which substantiates time. From this perspective, the reason why the sonority of silence, as in 4’33’’, can be seen to put forth time more effectively than music, conventionally understood, becomes clearer. While “made of” time, indeed, having time as its basic element, music also tends to conceal, or erase, its own temporality: harmony and pulse distract from duration.⁹⁵

At the première of 4’33’’ – and in subsequent live performances of the piece – the articulation of time through silence was not only something to be heard but, also, seen. Indeed, an audience not distracted by the music is able to turn to viewing even more than one “absorbed” by a melody and observe more carefully the visual cues. The musician comes on stage, sits in front of the piano, raises the keyboard cover but stops short of playing, lowers the keyboard at the end of the “first movement,” raises it again at the beginning of the “second movement,” and so on.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Cage, “Experimental Music,” 8.

⁹⁵ Chanan makes this point very effectively in *Repeated Takes*, 125.

⁹⁶ The first published version of the work, in 1960, consists of a typewritten script in which the Roman numerals I, II, III are used to indicate the three “movements” of the piece. Under each

In fact, as it is reflected in the expression “going to *see* a concert,” any *audience* to a musical performance is made of viewers, in the same way in which cinema spectators are also hearers. In fact, this even applies to silent-era cinema goers, where the show would routinely include live music accompaniment or, even, rudimental sound effects.

Cage’s 4’33” puts into relief the link between time and the sonority of silence, and between silence and its visuality. These links had also been outlined by Balázs in the chapter on sound of his *Theory of Film*. For Cage, as we have seen, the often unnoticed sonority of silence needs a strategy of amplification in order to be heard, be it a technique (the silencing of the musician), or a technology (the anechoic chamber).

Writing about cinema sound specifically, Balázs notes that “silence, too, is an acoustic effect, but only when sounds can be heard.”⁹⁷ By this he means that silence only becomes possible with the advent of sound cinema, where, paradoxically, it was not with silent film. It is only where sounds can be silenced that silence becomes possible, and that, of course, talking of cinema, it becomes possible to “see” it. Yet, there is another way in which cinematic silence is actually an “acoustic effect,” according to Balázs. He continues shortly after:

numeral, is the Latin word *tacet* (“stays silent”), as an instruction to the performer. A note specifies that, while at its première (at Woodstock, NY, August 29, 1952) the total duration was 4’33” and “the three parts were 55”, 2’40” and 1’20”, “the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.” See: Simon Shaw-Miller, *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), chapter 6, for both an account of subsequent performances of *silent piece*, and a discussion of the visual element of Cage’s performances in general.

⁹⁷ Balázs, *Theory of Film*, 205.

Silence is when the buzzing of a fly on the window-pane fills the whole room with sound and the ticking of a clock smashes time into fragments with sledge-hammer blows.⁹⁸

With this image, ambiguously blurring the boundaries between the “real” and the “cinematic,” Balázs is suggesting that silence is not silent at all. Indeed, as with Cage, the sonority of silence to which Balázs attracts attention is simultaneously dependent both on amplifications *and* abatements (dialogue, music). Like Cage with his 4’33”, Balázs is furthermore proposing that silence’s understated, often unnoticed auralty is that which most effectively concretizes time. It is the inescapable and foundational sonority of silence, the very sounds which constitute it as such – “the buzzing of a fly,” “the ticking of the clock” – that make time matter or, even, reveal time *as* matter; matter that can be smashed into fragments. Of course, in the case of an audio-visual technology like the cinema, silence is essentially related to images – more inextricably than in Cage’s 4’33”, which can exist as just an audio-recording. In cinema, therefore, the sonority of silence embeds time *in* the image, thus adding to the way in which the dynamics *of* the images may give us time in its unfolding, “change mummified,” as Bazin put it.

The “stroll sequence” in *La notte* effectively crystallizes the “acoustic effect” of silence Balázs describes, rendered feasible by the advent of cinema sound itself. The zone of relative quietness Antonioni stakes out through the muting of dialogue and music is in fact revealed to be full of sonority. And indeed, it is the same routine, banal sonority to resonate in Balázs’s, Cage’s and Antonioni’s silences. A similar logic is at work: it is the everydayness, the ordinariness of the sonority of silence that

⁹⁸ Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 205.

makes time matter. Antonioni's sonorous silences, which the audience can hear as well as "see" in the images, concretize duration, the passage of time. Indeed they do so, in Deleuze's words, through "an astonishing development of the idle periods of everyday banality."⁹⁹ And, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, this "development" of banality and "prolongation" of dead times may make the experience of time as such a primary condition of spectatorship.

Technology and Time

Vertov's silent-era switch from phonography to cinematography, out of frustration with the former, helps to bring into relief the extent to which the two technologies are cognate. As noted at the beginning, a line of continuity subtends the apparent cut that Vertov's turn from one to the other would seem, at first sight, to denote. And, in fact, the filmmaker returned to sound technology, combining it with cinema, as soon as a system that began to satisfy his requirements became available to him.¹⁰⁰ The consideration that, in the forms developed and patented by Edison, sound and visual technologies share, so to speak, a "father," further throws into relief their intertwined histories. A fundamental area of contiguity, from the beginning of their development, is the purchase these technologies are seen to have on time. In fact, understood as means for "seizing" and "archiving" time they also, in turn, shape the "thinking" of time itself. In important respects, more than simply contributing to

⁹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* [1985], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 5. In the French original, Deleuze writes "temps morts de la banalité quotidienne," thus creating a resonance with the cinematographic notion of *temps morts* for which Antonioni is also famous. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma II: L'Image-Temps* (Paris: de Minuit, 1985), 12.

making time manifest, they “demonstrate” it. And where photography could only capture discrete instants, the revolutionary promise of phonography and cinema lay in their ability to seize instants in their actual succession – time in its unfolding as such. Vertov’s frustration at the beginning of the “Kino-Eye” manifesto makes it easy to deduce what, for him, would have been the optimum solution. It would have been to have the phonograph *and* the movie camera capture the aural and the visual as “they rush past, like time,” so that both could be preserved, “organiz[ed]” and, indeed, played-back.¹⁰¹

Recorded Voices: Preserving the Passage of Time

The link between time and sound technologies comes to the fore most dramatically in relation to the human voice. By enabling the capture and/or preservation of the voice, sound technologies play a key role in the apprehension of a temporal subject, and of the passage of the self through time in particular. This is cogently conveyed by a sequence at the beginning of *The Passenger*.

Here Locke, a television reporter, goes back to the small, forsaken hotel in the North African desert where he is staying and, in the room adjacent to his, finds Robertson (whom he had befriended the night before), dead in his bed. At this sight, Locke’s reaction is to browse around the room and into Robertson’s diary and documents, casually put on a shirt belonging to the now dead man and, finally, pick up the telephone by the bed. On speaking to the hotel’s receptionist, he neither identifies himself nor mentions his discovery, but enquires about departing planes. As becomes clear in the course of the sequence, Locke sees this death as an

¹⁰⁰ See footnote 5.

¹⁰¹ Vertov, “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” 40.

opportunity for him to get out of the life, and indeed the “person” (his own) in which he feels stuck. This phone conversation, in which the receptionist is led to believe he is talking to the man he does not know is already dead (since the call comes from his room) is used to introduce the narrative core of the film: exchanged identity. To this end, the scene levers on the dislocation between body and voice which sound technology – here telephony – has rendered possible. In fact, further dislocations of this kind, and ensuing disorientation, will provide the formal means to consolidate this narrative theme as the sequence unfolds.

After hanging up, and having taken the dead man’s passport, Locke goes back to his room. In the next shot, he is sitting at his desk, looking down at both his and Robertson’s documents, open at the photograph page. Off-screen, there is a knock at the door. Locke looks up. A man’s voice, its source still off-screen, says: “Sorry to bother you like this, but I have seen your light was on and thought you might like a drink.” Locke looks back down and proceeds to switch the photos from one passport to the other. As two male voices – one of which Locke’s – start talking, even though Locke himself is obviously alone in the room, we realize that no one was actually at the door. Therefore, the soundtrack must refer to a conversation between the two men that Locke is recollecting, or imagining. At one point, however, the camera briefly pans to a tape recorder on a chair nearby: Locke is not reminiscing, but actually listening to a recorded conversation.

Yet, with this ambiguity resolved, the scene unfolds into another. A pensive Locke looks up from his counterfeiting job and looks away, towards the window which the camera, having followed the trajectory of his eyes, is now framing. A male figure enters the frame from the right, walks along the balcony and leans against the banister, looking out at the view. Seen from behind, it could be Locke himself, as he

is wearing the same light blue shirt. We are, again, disoriented: since the view *of* the balcony is, ostensibly, a point-of-view shot from Locke's perspective, he cannot, logically, be *on* the balcony at the same time. Soon, the man on the balcony is joined by another man, of whom we are offered a frontal view. Unmistakably, it is this second man who is Locke. Gradually, clues click into place. This shot must be a flashback to the night before, most probably Locke's own recollection. The man in the light-blue shirt Locke joins outside must be the now dead Robertson (whose shirt, in fact, we know Locke has just put on). The voices we were hearing from the tape recorder are now joined to bodies: the on-screen actors speak *them*, or speak in synch *to* them. Yet, after a while, the voices revert to their initially disembodied status. The camera pans back right and returns to Locke working at the passports on his desk, listening to the tape recorder, which, eventually, he switches off. Soon after, he will drag the corpse into his own room and then take possession of Robertson's room and luggage, thus – effectively – also donning Robertson's identity as such to the outside world.

Through the phone call first and, then, the taped conversation, this sequence hinges on the motif of the voice wrenched from its body through technology. Indeed, with sound technologies, the voice can be taken out of its own body, displaced spatially, as with telephony, and/or temporally, as with recording. This scene from *The Passenger* plays on both these dimensions: the voices on the telephone, spatially dislocated across the hotel, and the taped voices, temporally dislocated from the previous day.

In a famous passage of *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust's narrator is describing being on the telephone with his beloved grandmother for the first time. On the one hand, he is enthralled by the telephone's power to make present the voice of a person

miles away. Indeed, as the voice seems “altered in its proportions from the moment it was a whole,” in close-up, so to speak, and isolated from “her face and features,” the effect of presence is almost uncanny, excessive.¹⁰² Yet, at the same time, this larger-than-life presence is the very marker of absence. “This isolation of the voice” from the body is “like a symbol, an evocation, a direct consequence of another isolation”: the narrator’s physical separation from his grandmother.¹⁰³ In fact this absence is for him not only that of their current spatial distance, but also a foreboding of the permanent separation her death will bring:

‘Granny!’ I cried to her, ‘Granny!’ and I longed to kiss her, but I had beside me only the voice, a phantom as impalpable as the one that would perhaps come back to visit me when my grandmother was dead.¹⁰⁴

So here, a physical distance, a provisional and surmountable separation on a spatial axis, is felt to encapsulate and foretell a temporal distance, an unavoidable and irreversible separation along the axis of time. The grandmother’s distance in space, her physical absence from the place where the narrator is, makes him think of her distance in time – of a future, that is, in which *her* time will be irretrievably past.

‘Speak to me!’ But then, suddenly, I ceased to hear her voice, and was left even more alone. My grandmother could no longer hear me; she was no longer in communication with me; we had ceased to be close to each other, to

¹⁰² Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, 6 vols., vol. 3: *The Guermantes Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage, 2000), 149. On this point see Steve Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 380-381. Connor discusses how early users of the telephone were fascinated by the way in which the voices that emanated from the receiver “were both more mechanical and more human than ordinary voices.”

¹⁰³ Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 149.

be audible to each other; I continued to call her, groping in the empty darkness [...]. It seemed to me as though it was already a beloved ghost that I had allowed to lose herself in the ghostly world, and, standing alone before the instrument, I went on vainly repeating: ‘Granny! Granny!’ as Orpheus, left alone, repeats the name of his dead wife.¹⁰⁵

Sensing a presage of permanent separation into temporary physical distance, Proust is using telephony, a medium whose features would seem more directly linked to the dimension of space, to evoke the dimension of time.¹⁰⁶ This latter is more intuitively associated with phonographic technologies, as they not only wrench the voice from the body but, also, enable its preservation. Thus, a voice from the past can be brought up to the present, as the taped conversation with the recently dead man in *The Passenger* brings into relief. Once recorded, an utterance can be dislodged from both the temporal *and* spatial co-ordinates in which it originated, transported to different times and places. Furthermore, sound recording technologies enable us to do this with our own voices. As Kahn has noted, one of the crucial consequences of phonography, was that “with it came the unique ability to return the subject’s voice to his or her own ears.”¹⁰⁷ People became able to hear their own voice “deboned,” as opposed to *through* their bones and body, as they normally do.¹⁰⁸ For when one hears oneself speak, the voice is heard both externally, through its vibrations in the air, and “intracranially,” along an internal circuit of utterance and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 150-151.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of Proust and technology, see Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Kahn, “Track Organology,” *October* 55 (Winter 1990), 67-78. 72 cited.

¹⁰⁸ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 7.

audition, “as it is conducted from the throat and mouth through bone to the inner regions of the ear.”¹⁰⁹ “The phonograph’s discursive gear,” writes Kahn:

produced a veritable machine critique of the presence of the voice. No longer was the ability to hear oneself speak restricted to a fleeting moment. It became locked in a materiality that could both stand still and mute and also time travel by taking ones’ voice far afield from one’s own presence. A new loop of utterance and audition was interjected into the existing one, which in effect had been stretched and broken.¹¹⁰

But as sound recording technology returns the voice to its own speaker purely from the outside, it also enables the speaker to return, again (and again) to his or her own past utterances, as the characters re-listening to their own taped voices in *La notte* and *The Passenger* crystallize.

Early accounts of possible applications of the phonograph often emphasized its ability to preserve one’s own voice for family and posterity, envisaging, alongside a more public and impersonal use, a very intimate and private one. In 1878, listing ten possible ways in which his recent invention could “benefit mankind,” Edison himself included that of enabling the creation of a “‘Family Record’ – a registry of sayings, reminiscences, etc., by members of a family in their own voices, and of the last words of dying persons.”¹¹¹ As Jonathan Sterne has recently observed, this needs to be seen in the context of a culture of preservation – from the canning of food to the embalming of bodies – in which sound recording seemed at last to offer the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹¹¹ Thomas Alva Edison, in an article of June 1878 for *North American Review*, quoted by Roland Gellat, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 29.

opportunity to catch and keep that most ephemeral of entities.¹¹² “The voice,” Sterne quotes from the first issue, dated 1896, of a publication dedicated to phonography, “formerly invisible and irretrievably lost as uttered, can now be caught in its passage and preserved practically forever....Death has lost some of its sting since we are able to forever retain the voices of the dead.”¹¹³ Though the discourse was framed by pitting the permanence of the technology against the transience of human life, and by presenting the former as a means to partially revoke the latter, early recordings were actually extremely ephemeral and fragile. For all the emphasis on preserving “practically forever,” those on tinfoil would basically disintegrate once removed from the machine, while the later ones on removable wax cylinders would wear off pretty quickly too. Furthermore, even when recordings become more robust and durable, the very notion of preserving the voice seems to be always already haunted by the idea of absence, loss, distance, death – as *The Passenger* cogently conveys. Indeed, as Proust writes of telephony, the isolated close-up on the voice functions as the very marker of the body’s physical absence and, consequently, as a *memento mori* of the technological age.

The more personal, intimate function of the technology – the possibility of recording oneself and one’s own family – was in practice precluded when the phonographic industry, after a halted start, eventually took off at the beginning of the twentieth century. The models that were patented and put on the market were reproducing – playback – machines only, and phonography became chiefly a means for the diffusion of music. Hence perhaps Adorno’s statement, in the late 1920s, on the vicarious relation between the voice of the singer and the one of the owner of the record:

¹¹² Sterne, *The Audible Past*, esp. chapter 6.

What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person, which he would like to safeguard as a possession. The only reason that he accords the record such value is because he himself could also be just as well preserved.¹¹⁴

It is only with the emergence of magnetic tape after the Second World War that recording and hearing one's own voice becomes feasible and easy, as the hitherto previously separated functions of incision and reproduction are reunited within a single machine. In fact, as noted earlier, with the commercial development of lightweight and economical models in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, this opportunity becomes open to professionals and amateurs alike. The intimate use of the technology Edison had envisaged becomes viable, and Samuel Beckett's one-man play *Krapp's Last Tape*, written in the early years of the magnetic tape revolution, offers a very compelling reflection on it.¹¹⁵

Over forty years, Krapp has accumulated a meticulously archived phonodiary on magnetic reels. Now an old man, he is listening to extracts from his past, as he sets out to record what he has decided is his last tape. Centred around Krapp's quixotic attempt to preserve, if not time, then at least the passage of his own self *through* it, Beckett's play brings into relief the problematic tension between technological permanence and human ephemerality. Krapp has lived his life trying to counter this transience by way of technology. With his tapes, he has attempted to

¹¹³ "Voices of the Dead," *Phonoscope* 1 (15 November 1896), 1: quoted by Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 308.

¹¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle" [1927], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Essays on Music*, selected by Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 274.

create a solid, durable record of his own evanescent existence *in* time, capturing “the grain” (as opposed to “the husks”): “those things worth having when all the dust has – when all *my* dust has settled.”¹¹⁶ “Moments,” he says, “[h]er moments, my moments. The dog’s moments.”¹¹⁷ In a way, Krapp’s own temporality is preserved on magnetic tape, as Bazin wrote of cinema, as in a sort of “mummy” of change itself. Just by digging out an old reel, he can call up to the present his younger self, narrating a time and a place from the past.¹¹⁸ Yet, the more these moments are replayed – and Krapp insists on one in particular – the less tangible and real they become, the more their fundamental irretrievability becomes evident.¹¹⁹ Listening to his own younger self again and again, to a moment in his life again and again, is not, as Krapp had realized decades earlier, like “be[ing] again.”¹²⁰ Indeed, Krapp’s entire enterprise is permeated by an intrinsic sense of loss, as if the materiality of the tapes were the very token of the impossibility to preserve what he set out to seize through technology in the first place. In spite of the meticulous abundance of recordings, the passage of time and the passage of the self through time have escaped technology: the “best years are gone” and all that old Krapp has left in exchange are reels of tape.¹²¹ As for Barthes, by its very nature, a photograph is always an “imperious sign” of death, telling “death in the future,” so here the recordings also work as just such a premonition.¹²²

¹¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape* [1958] and *Embers* [1959] (London: Faber and Faber, 1959).

¹¹⁶ Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁸ Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 14.

¹¹⁹ Bazin’s argument in “Death Every Afternoon” that the cinematic representation of death is obscene draws on this contrast between actual loss and technological re-presentation. Since, “for every creature, death is the unique moment par excellence,” Bazin argues, the possibility of its repetition on screen time and again is a form of “desecration,” 30-31.

¹²⁰ Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, 19.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* [1980], trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 95-96.

Robertson's recorded voice in *The Passenger* functions as a premonition in reverse. Heard after the character's death, it highlights the transience and irreversibility of human time, precisely by drawing attention to the very paradox on which recording is predicated. Technologies of recording in general are seen to make present what is, crucially, not fully there: yet, as they make "present" an absence, the constitutive absence of the thing itself is also inevitably foregrounded. In Fellini's *La dolce vita*, a *mise-en-scène* of the recorded voice is used in similar ways to *The Passenger*, both to reveal and produce a tension between technological permanence and human ephemerality, preservation and loss, presence and absence. As briefly mentioned, in the scene set in Steiner's house, a portable tape recorder, on which a compilation of natural sounds is played, enchants the guests at his party. But in fact, just before this, we are shown one of the guests, perhaps bored with the evening, resort to the novelty machine to tape the ongoing conversation. Only seconds later, he rewinds the reel and plays back some snippets of it – Steiner's reflections on his own insignificance in particular. This recording of the human voice, only fractionally dislocated, in both time and space, from the body of the speaker, inspires an eerie mood. It works to create an awareness of the permanence of the recording as against the impermanence of human temporality, and the relentlessness of the passage of time. This recorded voice, speaking words spoken, and heard, only minutes before, resounds with a spectral presence amongst the guests. Steiner, there – alive – in the room, is enveloped by his own recorded voice as if by an omen of death. Shortly after, he will kill his two children before committing suicide. The film does not show us this, but returns to the scene the morning after the tragic event, where the deaths are being investigated by the police. Here, the earlier recording is played once more. Now the grain of Steiner's voice is a relic: in its very presence it ciphers a lack of

body, irreparable loss and death. Endlessly repeatable, lending itself to fast-forwarding and rewinding, being paused and resumed at leisure, the recording is the very token of the irretrievability and irreversibility of human life; playable only once, in one direction.

Common to *The Passenger*, *La dolce vita*, and *Krapp's Last Tape* (performed on stage or on screen, as in Egoyan's film adaptation of 2000, starring John Hurt) is that they, as visual representations, are constructed around a *mise-en-scène* of the technology itself. As such, they allow a visualization of the temporal and spatial dislocation of the voice at the heart of recording technology, of the separation of the voice from the body. In fact, the audio-visual representation does not simply stage this "split" between the voice and its body, but endows it with temporal depth. Indeed, in each of my three examples, the temporal dimension of this dislocation is given particular emphasis. Whether on stage or on screen, a sixty-nine year old Krapp is juxtaposed to a recording of his voice when he was thirty-nine; Steiner's taped voice is played before *and* after the irreversible temporal cut of death, as in *The Passenger*. The result is a representation where the past, in some form, returns to the present, where the present, in Benjamin's words, "is shot through with chips" of the past.¹²³ This juxtaposition of before and after is very poignant, as it highlights the fundamental difference between human and technological time: a recording can be repeated, human existence cannot, the former is reversible, the latter is not. Where these three works articulate the temporality of the human subject through the allusion or the inclusion of death, the scene from *La notte* of Valentina by her tape recorder, playing back an extract of her phonodiary, does so in a less tragic fashion.

¹²³ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" [completed 1940; published posthumously 1950], in *Illuminations*, 255.

Through the *mise-en-scène* of the recorded voice, two different times are made to coincide in the moving, or, as Michel Chion pointedly prefers to call it, in the “audio-visual” image¹²⁴: a “past” and a “present.” If on the one hand this rehearses the temporal and spatial separation of body from voice which sound technology enables, on the other, the body and its voice, temporally separated, are also rejoined in the image. They are sutured around a cut, a split, we could say. Indeed, this is also the cut “internal” to the image of which Deleuze talks in the last chapter of his *Cinema II*, whose discussion is inspired by Chion’s thinking in particular.

“The sound film is dualistic,” Chion argues in *The Voice in the Cinema*, continuing:

The physical nature of cinema necessarily makes an incision or cut between the body and the voice. Then the cinema does its best to re-stitch the two together at the seam.¹²⁵

Yet sometimes, Chion notes, “cinema’s split is even on display.”¹²⁶ Indeed, his book is in great part dedicated to discussing these particular cases. These range from the de-synchronization between characters and their voices typical of Fellini’s films, to the more radical disconnection between sound and image track in Marguerite Duras’s *India Song* (1975), where the on-screen actors do not speak, but only loosely enact the fragmentary story being told by a collage of off-screen voices.¹²⁷

Duras’s films are the examples on which Deleuze draws when he considers sound in his taxonomic analysis of the cinema of the time-image. The great divide

¹²⁴ Chion, *Audio-Vision*.

¹²⁵ Chion, *The Voice in the Cinema*, 125.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

between “so-called classic cinema and so-called modern cinema does not coincide with that between the silent film and the talkie,” Deleuze argues. On the contrary, the “modern implies a new use of the talking, the sound and the musical.”¹²⁸ This is characterized by the presence of “two ‘heautonomous’ images, one visual and one sound, with a fault, an interstice, an irrational cut between them.” For Deleuze, this “*interstice between two framings, the visual and the sound*,” internal to the cinematic image itself, is what defines modern cinema, the “second stage of the talkie,” as he also calls it from the perspective of sound. Composed of “an auditory image *and* an optical image,” the cinematic image becomes thoroughly “audio-visual.” (The term’s allusion to televisual and video technology is intended by Deleuze, who asserts that “this second stage would never have arisen without television.”) Yet, for Deleuze, this radical independence between the two, this “heautonomy,” “does not burst [the image] into pieces”; on the contrary, it “reinforces” it, giving it “a new consistency, which depends on a more complex link,” or, as he also calls this “new intertwining,” “a specific relinkage.”¹²⁹

The Passenger, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *La dolce vita* and *La notte* all stage voice recording equipment, and make us hear a diegetic recording of the voice of one of their characters while their body is also on screen. Their demonstration of sound technology is hinged around a cutting and re-stitching, a separating and re-joining of the voice with its body. What is made visible of this re-stitching and re-joining, though, is an irremediable interstice between the two, in the form of a temporal gap between body and voice. Stored, the voice can be delayed with respect to its body, returned to it from a different time. Where in *La notte* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 129-130. For a reading the off-screen voices alternative to Deleuze’s, see: Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 183ff.

¹²⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 241.

¹²⁹ This quote and all of the above: *ibid.*, 251-253. Emphasis in original.

voice is clearly made to come from the past, in *The Passenger* its temporal location is more ambiguous. When it is “attached” to Locke’s flashback, the recorded voice comes from the future of the moment visualized on screen. In this instance, this re-joining – which, for a few shots, is manifested through the synching of images to sound – is in fact an imaginary construction: diegetically, it is, indeed, Locke’s memory. Thus, as when the conversation of the night before is replayed after Steiner’s suicide in *La dolce vita*, the film shows that, so to speak, the voice “returns” *too* late, for its body has gone. Through the recorded voice the human subject is presented as being at the mercy of time. The subject is either “fractured” by time, his/her present shot through with fragments of the past (memories here taking the very material form of recordings), or swept away by its passage (the taped voice as the material trace of his/her former presence). On the one hand, all these examples seem to hinge on notions of technological permanence in order to draw out a contrast with the fragility and transience of human life. They pit machine time, a time that endures and returns, versus human time – a time that passes irreversibly. Yet, crucially, *La notte* also brings into relief the very ephemeral, fugitive and fragile nature of the technology itself. When, having played an extract of her phonodiarist, Valentina seems to be rewinding the reel she is, on the contrary, erasing everything. On a whim of dissatisfaction, she has deleted all her work, to the disappointment and regret of her fascinated guest.

Capturing Time, but in Time

This act of erasure pushes to the foreground the very limits of recording technologies (both aural and visual), thus drawing attention to a fundamental paradox on which

they are predicated. Charged with the task of registering and conserving the passage of time, they are not themselves outside of it. Neither are they immune to its ravages.

The logic of repetition at the heart of their functioning would seem to immunize them from irreversibility and to provide a means of escape from it. Yet, even endless playbacks, however circular the internal logic, unfold cumulatively in time, producing an external duration which is irreversible and unrepeatable. In fact, the major paradox of recording technologies is that, though they may preserve time, they do not – cannot – do so outside of it. They are not suspended out of time, but immersed in it, capturing time *in* time. When considered from the perspective of the digital age, the 1960s' proud *mise-en-scène* of magnetic tape recorders throws into relief the historicity of the medium itself. Observing Valentina while she drags her bulky yet, by the standards of the time, portable machine across the room, and fiddles with large reels of tape, we are reminded that what we now perceive as old was once (not long ago) new and current.¹³⁰ While Krapp's magnetic spools are now obsolete, when the play was written, in 1958, it had to be set "in the future."¹³¹ Tape recording technology had not been around long enough to make good the claim that Krapp, on his sixty-ninth birthday, had been recording his life for over forty years.

Atom Egoyan distilled this tension between timelessness and timeliness inherent to recording technologies in a London installation of 2002. Artangel (the UK arts charity that commissioned the project) described the work as "a monument to analogue."¹³² And indeed it was monumentally that *Steenbeckett* addressed the twilight of analogue technologies, overtaken by the diffusion of digital alternatives.

¹³⁰ On this, see Laura Mulvey, "Passing Time: Reflections on Cinema from a New Technological Age," *Screen* 45, Special Issue: Mediated Times (Summer 2004), 142-155. Thinking of cinema in particular, Mulvey considers how digital technology not only throws into relief "cinema's ageing" but also grants "new" visibility and accessibility to the old (143).

¹³¹ Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Embers*, 9.

¹³² See <http://www.artangel.org.uk/pages/past/02/02_egoyan.htm>, accessed 23 September 2004.

Yet, installed for just about a month, in a venue otherwise (provisionally) disused, *Steenbeckett* was a *temporary* monument: the ineluctability of the passing of time it evoked in relation to celluloid and magnetic tape, was also directly demonstrated by the work's very own *timed* existence.¹³³ Housed in the former Museum of Mankind, the installation was impregnated with obsolescence by the very site, and not only because it had already been mothballed for a few years by 2002.¹³⁴ Host to the British Museum's ethnographic collection, the imposing neoclassical building had in many ways become an increasingly problematic venue for the material, too redolent of a negatively obsolete and contested way of thinking and classifying humanity, in spite of curatorial efforts at reform.¹³⁵ Indeed, perhaps the fraught status of the venue itself was what contributed to render Egoyan's tribute to analogue precisely not a romanticized, nostalgic longing for an irretrievable past, but a critical staging of the technology, its purchase *on* time, and its location *in* time.

Using a number of rooms inside the museum, Egoyan's dramatic display vividly brought into focus how technologies, and related practices and techniques, seen to be quintessentially dedicated to the preservation, documentation and archiving of time itself, are, in their turn, subject to time. Walking through semi-darkness, the viewer would initially come to a passageway crowded with the scattered contents of an old ethnographic film archive. Unfurled from their spools, feet of film lay strewn across the floor, rising to a small heap in some corners. Rusty canisters, yellowed index cards and instruction sheets, the spilled contents of filing cabinets dotted across the space, old lenses (some smashed), various types of cameras and an unwieldy reel tape recorder also added to the orchestrated mess. In

¹³³ *Steenbeckett* was shown from 15 February to 17 March 2002.

¹³⁴ The building has now re-opened, and is used by the Royal Academy for temporary exhibitions.

¹³⁵ Cf. Annie E. Coombes, "Atom Egoyan's *Steenbeckett* – An Installation," *American Anthropologist* 105 (March 2003), 161-163.

their sheer abundance, these by now redundant if not defunct objects created a sense, as one critic put it, “of time recorded then forgotten.”¹³⁶ These technologies here demonstrated time like a wrinkled face does: on show was their own age(ing) and historicity.¹³⁷

Through another corridor, the installation continued in a differently cramped space: a narrow room, whose long walls were occupied, on one side, by a couple of benches and, on the other, by a projection of Egoyan’s aforementioned own film for television of Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Here, the effect was both cinematic and televisual. Larger than life, the images filled the entire wall, as at the cinema, yet the size of the room was more that of a private living room, bringing the visitor right up under the disproportionately large projection. This tension between contrasting sizes created an effect of suffocating intimacy – certainly in tone with Krapp’s asphyxiating enclosure within the circuit of his own temporality, with the overbearing (and very material) burden of his memories and his spools. Yet, too close for comfortable viewing, at such extreme proximity “the cinematic spectacle,” according to Annie Coombes, “disintegrates.” Rather than “seductive verisimilitude,” she explains, Egoyan’s strategy gave us “the materiality of both the screen and the film itself.”¹³⁸ While the installation certainly did attract attention to these structural aspects, I think that it did so precisely by holding in place cinematic spectacle, to which, by collapsing the distance, it gave us unusual “access.” Nose to the screen, we were made to enter the imaginary space of the cinematic image,

¹³⁶ Andrew Lockhart, “Steenbeckett Reviewed,” at <http://www.myvillage.co.uk/pages/arts-steen.htm>, accessed 23 September 2004.

¹³⁷ As artist-in-residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montréal, in 2003, Egoyan realised another “monument to analogue,” one which focused, in fact, on the obsolescence of magnetic tape. *Out of Use* consisted of an assemblage of forty reel-to-reel recording machines, with a system that interconnected and amplified the tapes being played. For the project, Egoyan asked people to bring their old and disused recording machines and tapes, and encouraged them to record a final tape with their recollections of the last time they used the machine. See: John K. Grande, “Montréal – Atom Egoyan,” *Sculpture* 22 (June 2003), 76-77.

drawn into Krapp's claustrophobic studio, brought face to face with his spools, his tape recorder, as just another space of the installation itself. This space, focusing on the fall into "pastness" of magnetic tape, offered a further reflection on technology's exposure to the ravages of time, via Krapp's very failure to save *his* time through it.

Conversely, rather than making spectacle *by* projecting film, the final part of the installation made film *itself* – its physical properties and mechanics – quite literally, spectacle. Aptly situated in the auditorium of what was once the Museum's cinema, it created a moving sculpture in celluloid, which viewers were allowed to see from a perspective unconventional for both sculpture and cinematic spectacle. Purchase on the piece, in fact, was from the elevated and relatively distant angle of the cinema's projection booth. From behind its glass, visitors could see a long loop of 35 mm film, suspended between floor and ceiling, transversing and criss-crossing the large auditorium space. Feeding in and out of a Steenbeck editing machine in the far corner, the film would form an intricate, shuddering pattern, "like a quivering spider's web."¹³⁹ On the Steenbeck's small monitor, a flickering image of the film just left in the previous room could be glimpsed.

Here, the materiality of celluloid was emphasized through an evocation of sculpture, the quintessential medium of matter and three-dimensionality. Yet, the close-up contemplation of the object that sculpture usually invites was denied, as the film-sculpture lay behind glass, in a way replicating, but in reverse, the "screening" of a cinematic situation. The palpability and materiality of celluloid itself, its "thingness," were put on display, made spectacle, yet rendered literally ungraspable and impalpable. And through these altered conditions of viewing, both here and in the previous room, the installation evoked a series of contrasts through which

¹³⁸ Combes, "Atom Egoyan's *Steenbeckett*," 162.

recording technologies, time and memory alike are defined, such as the unresolved tension between palpability and impalpability, materiality and immateriality, presence and absence, persistence and transience. In so doing, Egoyan's work pointed to the paradoxes intrinsic to each as well as to those that, consequently, are inherent in their interrelations.

The installation used the ageing of technologies largely dedicated to the capture and storage of time to convey the notion of the ineluctability of the passing of time itself. In Egoyan's scenario, both the private and the public archive, having set out to seize and preserve time through these technologies, have resulted in failure. Krapp's extended phonodiary, as discussed, is haunted by the fundamental absence of "the life" it wanted to save. The public archive is equally unsatisfactory, inadequate and fragmentary in *Steenbeckett*: it is just discarded remnants. The installation was at once a reflection on the twilight of analogue technologies from the threshold of the digital age, and an assessment of their insufficiencies or, perhaps, of the inadequacy of any attempt to preserve and archive time as such.¹⁴⁰ Yet, paradoxically, what emerged from this focus on technology's ultimate failure to capture time, was a glimpse of "time itself," as Deleuze, in his Proustian voice, would put it.¹⁴¹ If we can "extract from the event the part that cannot be reduced to what happens," he writes, "that part of inexhaustible possibility" is time itself.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Lockhart, "Steenbeckett Reviewed."

¹⁴⁰ The fact that Egoyan's film, though originally shot on 35 mm, was transferred on digital video for projection, illuminates the fact that Egoyan himself, though producing work that reflects on this twilight phase of analogue, does not have a "reactionary" attitude to the new. We could say that the tone of the exhibition was nostalgic, but not regretful, like Krapp's own attitude to his past. As a reviewer put it, "Krapp's closing lines of speech [begin] to sound like the voice of film itself, musing on its historical destiny: 'Perhaps my best years are gone. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back.'" See Martin Herbert, "Temporary Memory Loss," *Art Review* 53 (April 2002), 82-83. 83 cited.

¹⁴¹ For a discussion of the role of Proust in Deleuze's thought, see: Patrick ffrench, "'Time in the Pure State': Deleuze, Proust and the Image of Time," in Gill, *Time and the Image*, 161-171.

¹⁴² Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 19.

“For everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change”¹⁴³; time, in short, is constant change, the very *form* of change.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

Chapter 4: Ends (and Beginnings)

After the huge success of *Blow up* (1966), the film's producer, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, invested five times as much in the making of *Zabriskie Point* (1970), Antonioni first "American" film.¹ Despite the lavish costs, *Zabriskie Point* was a critical and commercial disaster: as the Canadian artist Rodney Graham put it, it was "the bomb that almost sunk Antonioni's film career."² Ironically, the film ends with a real bomb, used to blow a lush mansion into smithereens. The scene itself is spectacular: for several minutes, the screen fills with smoke, debris and blazing fire, climaxing in an almost monochrome red at the point in which the explosion is eventually shown in close-up. After this, the view turns "cooler," and more surreal. A series of smaller detonations – of a clothes' rack, a bookcase, a television set, a fridge – sends the multifarious contents of these objects floating into an icy-blue background. And so, for several more minutes, and to a hallucinatory track by Pink Floyd, we follow roast chickens, Kellogg's corn flakes, packs of sliced bread, books, t-shirts, flowers, in their centrifugal, slow-motion flight across the sky.

This extraordinary final scene entailed an enormously costly operation, for which the latest technology was used. Seventeen synchronized cameras, placed at different distances and angles, captured the explosion of the house. The smaller, slow-motion blasts were shot with special high-speed machines, on film stock

¹ See: Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Chatman reports that *Zabriskie Point*'s return was \$891,918 for an investment of about \$ 7,000,000 – "the most expensive failure ever made" (160).

² Rodney Graham, "Softcore: More Solo Guitar Music for the Sex Scene, *Zabriskie Point*," artist's notes for live performance on 8 March 2001, part of *Rodney Graham*, solo exhibition, 9 March to 7 April 2001, at Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Belgium.
Website: <http://www.gms.be/graham_exhibition_2001.html>, accessed 3 March 2004.

without sprocket holes so as to allow for even greater velocity.³ Antonioni revelled in it. Though the making of *Zabriskie Point* had been fraught with controversy with the American studio, he would later remember this massive act of destruction as “one of the rare times” in which he actually enjoyed filming: “I was very tense but happy. There was something very daring about that scene!”⁴ Was Antonioni perhaps thinking of going out with a bang? *Zabriskie Point* had been awaited with huge anticipation both in America and in Europe. Antonioni had gained international fame throughout the 1960s, praised by critics – but for the notorious booing of *L'avventura* (1960) at its Cannes première, which, in fact, furthered rather than lessened the film’s success – and awarded prizes at the major European festivals.⁵ Indeed, it was this that had won him American backing for *Blow up*, whose amazing results persuaded MGM to offer the Italian director a contract for two more films. So, with the benefit of hindsight, *Zabriskie Point*’s catastrophic explosion seems prophetic – if not, in fact, mimetic – of the effect the film itself was going to have on Antonioni’s career. While not quite ending it, the film certainly dealt it a major blow, from which, further hampered by other factors (including the stroke Antonioni suffered in the early 1980s), it never completely recovered.

That *Zabriskie Point* buttresses and redoubles its own end with a violent image of destruction, that, in short, the film ends *with* an “ending,” is somewhat

³ For this, see among others Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*, third edition (New York: Continuum, 2001), 227-228; and the documentary by Sandro Lai, *Michelangelo Antonioni: lo sguardo che ha cambiato il cinema* (*Michelangelo Antonioni: The Eye that Changed Cinema*, 2001).

⁴ Aldo Tassone, “La storia del cinema la fanno i film” [interview with Antonioni; 1979], in Michelangelo Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere: Scritti sul cinema*, ed. Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi (Venezia: Marsilio, 1994), 191. For Antonioni’s conflicts with MGM see: Marsha Kinder, “*Zabriskie Point*” [interview with Antonioni; 1968], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, esp. 274-75.

⁵ *L'avventura* won the Jury Prize at Cannes, and so did *L'eclisse* in 1962. Among other prizes, Antonioni obtained the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for *La notte* in 1961, and the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival for *Red Desert* in 1964. In 1968 he was garnered the Cannes Golden Palm for *Blow up*.

anomalous. For Antonioni's films of the previous decade had seemed to follow a trend of ending with a "beginning," or indeed their *own* beginning, as the narrative would be brought back to more or less the point where it had started. This is most evident in *Red Desert* (1964), whose finale, more than just echoing the initial sequence, seems to repeat it almost exactly. As at the start of the film, Giuliana is seen walking with her son outside the bleak industrial plant owned by her husband. The two characters are wearing precisely the same clothes as before (whose green and yellow we are likely to remember for the contrast they cut with the surrounding greyness), and the chimneys are still belching the same deadly fumes into an all but lifeless environment.

Despite this contrast, *Zabriskie Point* and *Red Desert* share much more than it may initially appear. Firstly, although *Red Desert* duplicates, and thus dovetails with its own beginning both narratively and visually, there is also a sense in which, through and through, it is a film about endings, if not even, indeed, "The End." Is the "desert" of the title the utopian beach of Giuliana's fantasy, or the barren, polluted landscape through which the characters normally move? Does "red" designate the soft, warm sand she dreams of, or the poisoned, slimy waters from which all fish, as Giuliana's husband casually observes, have disappeared? If the camera seems intent on revealing, or even *making*, the beauty of the industrial spaces it depicts, this very quality lies as much in the air of devastation and degradation they exude as in their "modernity" and "newness." The futuristic-looking present that *Red Desert* embodies is (already) broken, faded, consumed. Its modern reality is eroded by decay: it is also, in a way, in ruins and archaic.

Secondly, this thematic of "The End" hinges on the idea of the desert in both films. Evoked as a space at once utopian and dystopian in *Red Desert*, in *Zabriskie*

Point this is an actual geographical location: the Mojave Desert and Death Valley in California. Ravaged mercilessly by processes of corrosion and depletion, deserts are, quintessentially, places of deterioration. In *Zabriskie Point*, corrosion seems to be presented as a millennial – and mostly “natural” – activity: the specific “point” in Death Valley after which the film is named, as the sign over which the characters pause tells us, is between five and ten million years old. In *Red Desert*, by contrast, destruction has occurred over a much shorter time span, and is largely a (by)product of civilization or in fact, more specifically, modernization. Yet, *Zabriskie Point* shows this too. As the final explosion vividly encapsulates, “nature’s desert” is also the site of devastating operations of desertification at the hand of man.

Thirdly, and for this reason, the association of “The End” with the desert also connects to the notion of time and its apparent irreversibility. Desertification and the desert manifest the tightness of time’s “direction,” and with it, the intrinsic unrepeatability and evanescence of time itself.

In their use of the desert as a site, and a sign, of devastation and catastrophe, *Red Desert* and *Zabriskie Point* encapsulate many of the period’s anxieties about “The End.” *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Frank Kermode’s famous diagnosis of apocalyptic fears as intrinsic to humanity, can be seen as symptomatic of the very fear it scrutinizes, and therefore, of the acuteness of this idea at that time.⁶ Undoubtedly, an imaginary of “The End” multiplied in literature, film and the arts in general. Antonioni’s desolate landscapes crystallize so vividly how the buoyancy of construction and reconstruction in the postwar boom also had destruction as its complement, given the negative effects of industrialization itself as well as the political climate of the cold war. Italo Calvino evoked similar scenarios in some of

⁶ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

his novels. In “Smog” (1958), the spectre of irreparable pollution is coupled with that of nuclear devastation as (the desert, again) a mysterious fine powder, at once a cipher of industrial detritus and of atomic dust, slowly, but relentlessly covers the world.⁷ In his dystopian science-fiction novels, J.G. Ballard addressed the idea of the apocalypse most insistently, and prolifically, throughout the 1960s. In “The Voices of Time” (1960), an intergalactic telegraph wires through to Earth, second by second, the irreversible countdown to “The End.”⁸ Ballard imagined and *re*-imagined this final moment through a plethora of ecological cataclysms and “post-human” worlds (sand-flooded in “The Cage of Sand,” devastated by nuclear explosion in “The Terminal Beach,” desiccated in “The Drought”), still populated, however, by a few dazed and isolated survivors struggling to get by.⁹ These stories were high among the texts that inspired Robert Smithson to think about endings through the idea of the desert as, both geologically and metaphorically, a place of time and its irreversibility; or, as he would like to call it, of entropy. Yet, as we shall see, for Smithson, the entropic condition the desert exemplifies is not only contradictory but also highly ambivalent: the place where the end and the beginning become contiguous, if not thoroughly confused.

While the desert in *Zabriskie Point* is an exemplary entropic scenario, just as the devastating final blast is a powerful image of “The End,” the film also encapsulates how these can be a lure *as well as* a threat. For endings can also, paradoxically, embody a fantasy of beginnings. Indeed, “fantasy” is the status assigned to this real explosion in the context of the film’s narrative, where it is eventually revealed to be the product of the protagonist’s imagination. A phantasmic

⁷ Italo Calvino, “La nuvola di smog” [1958], in *Romanzi e racconti*, eds. Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falcetto, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1991).

⁸ J.G. Ballard, “The Voices of Time” [1960], in *The Voices of Time* (London: Phoenix, 1992).

precipitate of her anger, it also therefore designates “The End” as a radical, if largely utopian, gesture of obliteration and annihilation that is certainly exhilarating and may, even, be ultimately generative. And so, where *Red Desert* reveals an affinity with *Zabriskie Point* by being about endings or, in fact, “The End,” *Zabriskie Point*, conversely, discloses one with *Red Desert* because, paradoxically, it “ends with a beginning,” as Jonas Mekas saw it.¹⁰ For Mekas, in fact, the explosive finale symbolized a sort of *tabula rasa*, the “Zero Point” that the space of the desert itself – and Death Valley in particular – incarnated.¹¹

But before returning to the desert, let me consider how cinema, an epitome of repetition in various ways, whose “guiding myth,” for André Bazin, is “an image unburdened by [...] the irreversibility of time,” can also be an embodiment of exactly the opposite principles.¹²

Cinema and Repetition, or The Line in the Loop

According to Kermode, in order to try and make sense of the world, humanity has always had – and, indeed, has always needed – a fictional account of its end. “And of course,” he writes, coming to discuss what, in 1967, was the present, “we have it now, the sense of an ending.”¹³ Kermode has more recently surmised that even his

⁹ J.G. Ballard, “The Cage of Sand” (1961), in *The Voices of Time*; “The Terminal Beach” [1964], in *The Terminal Beach* (London: Phoenix, 2001), *The Drought* (London: Cape, 1965).

¹⁰ Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 373. The entry is for “February 19, 1970: In Defense of *Zabriskie Point* (2).”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² André Bazin, “The Myth of Total Cinema” [1946], in *What Is Cinema?* trans. and ed. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 21.

¹³ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 98.

own landmark text was itself partly a product of the intensity of that “sense” in the 1960s. Amidst events such as the Cuban missile crisis and Kennedy’s assassination, the war in Vietnam and the race riots on US soil, “words like ‘megadeath’ were common currency,” he observes, and “it seemed more than merely possible that there was some bad time coming, possibly a terminally bad time.”¹⁴ For Kermode – who was here writing an epilogue for a re-edition of *The Sense of an Ending* published to coincide with the end of the millennium – this reinforces, and demonstrates, his overall thesis. Not only do apocalyptic anxieties “threaten us at any time,” quite independently of millennia but, in fact, the thought of “The End” is constitutive of humanity itself.¹⁵

At the same time, however, the forms these scenarios of “The End” may take vary historically. So the “apocalypse of the twentieth century,” Kermode argues, is a largely secular and “demythologized” affair.¹⁶ Coincident with the sense of crisis, transition, rupture embedded within, and constitutive of, modernity itself, the sense of an ending has become “endemic.”¹⁷ As such, Kermode argues, it is characterized by “the conviction that the end is immanent rather than imminent.”¹⁸ In short, the end itself becomes, paradoxically, somewhat endless, “recurrent, if not perpetual.”¹⁹ And perhaps *Zabriskie Point*’s protracted closing sequence crystallizes precisely this notion of an end that “returns” and does not want to end as, furthermore, the moment of the house explosion itself is repeated over a dozen times. Thus, in this dramatic sequence, the idea of a catastrophic ending is paradoxically confronted with its own repetition. So whilst this repetitiousness may indeed evoke the “immanence” of the

¹⁴ Frank Kermode, “Epilogue: The Sense of an Ending, 1999,” in *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181-182.

¹⁵ Ibid., 182.

¹⁶ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), 133.

¹⁷ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸ Ibid., 101.

apocalypse in modernity, as Kermode suggests, it also raises the issue of repetition *itself* as a kind of “end.” For the end did not necessarily need to be a big last “bang” but could, in fact, take the semblance of obstinate, repetitive persistence. This was indeed what it consisted of for E.M. Cioran, for whom it was the increasing routinization and standardization of contemporary life that amounted to a form of ending, a “fall out of time” and into the “sterile zone,” the “sub-temporal desolation” of “this motionless present, this tension in monotony.”²⁰ “Blind repetition” is a “burial,” an “abyss where one hopes in vain for denouement, where one rots in immortality.”²¹

And where the monotony and dullness of modernized reality might be represented *through* cinema (as, in fact, Antonioni himself had done), the technology *of* cinema, itself an emblem of modernity and the processes of mechanization and automation therein, could be brought into relief as an incarnation of repetition as such. In a way, this is what *Zabriskie Point*’s final scene does. Despite being planned and staged, the film’s explosion was a “real” – and indeed, in many ways, “unique” – event. Independently of having been inserted in the fiction of the narrative, its reality, recorded on film, is not ontologically different from the “facts” captured by documentary. Yet, simultaneously shot by seventeen different cameras, and reproduced in the film itself almost as many times, the very uniqueness of this documentary event is at once multiplied and denied by its recursiveness. The tension engendered between the actual unrepeatability of the blast itself and its cinematic repetition is the “contradiction” inherent in technologies of recording as such *vis à vis* time. Widely perceived not simply to be crucial to, but actually to enable the

¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

²⁰ E.M. Cioran, *The Fall Into Time* [1964], trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 174 and 178. The chapter is entitled: “The Fall *Out* of Time” (my emphasis).

²¹ Cioran, *The Fall Into Time*, 178-179.

“apprehension” of time and its passing, these technologies do so by putting what is intrinsically fleeting into a circuit of repeatability and reproducibility. André Bazin conveyed some of the force of this paradox when he wrote that the cinema, the most complete “art of time” in his view (photography lacks movement, and phonography he saw as dedicated not to “real,” or “lived” time but to the “aesthetic time” of music), had “the *exorbitant* privilege of repeating it.”²² “Exorbitant” because, Bazin argues, cinema can make “lived time,” “essentially irreversible and qualitative,” somewhat reversible and quantitative – measured, indeed, in film frames.²³ Embalmed in celluloid, the time that has been lived can be re-animated; spent once, it can be spent again, by the audience, since – at some level – time itself has been turned into an object of repetition, and a repetitive object, like the filmstrip that “carries” it.

In fact, repetition is at the heart of cinema in many ways. It is not only in the mechanical succession of frames and in the repeatability of the film as a whole, but also in the various rehearsals and takes during production; in the recursiveness of diegetic conventions and codes; in its historical origin in the loops of optical toys and early devices such as the kinetoscope. And, of course, all of these were under analysis and were, so to speak, being rediscovered in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. For, as we have seen, this was a period of intensive inquiry into all aspects of cinema, characterized not only by unprecedented experimentation with the medium but also, among other things, by the institutionalization of film studies as an academic discipline.²⁴ The filmstrip and its repetitive format became “visible”:

²² André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon” [1949], trans. Mark A. Cohen, in Ivone Margulies, ed., *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 30.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For a contemporary reflection on the “history” of the institutionalization of film studies, see: Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

physically flaunted, as in Paul Sharits' installations, made the very subject of the film, as in Malcolm Le Grice's *Little Dog for Roger* (1967), disruptively propelled into view in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), used by scholars for frame-by-frame analysis in the 1970s. Furthermore, experimental filmmakers started to project footage on a loop. This would echo both the "spliceless loops" of "paleocinema," the "eternity of hurdling horses and bouncing balls" of the zoetrope and other devices, as Frampton once put it, and the early history of cinema itself, when, reels being short, film would often be spliced on a continuous band.²⁵

In his "movie-journal" columns for *The Village Voice* during the 1960s (anthologized in a book in 1972), Mekas would often report on some of these soirées dedicated to "loops." The entry for 30 April 1964, for example, describes a screening of Dick Higgins' *Invocation of Canyons and Boulders for Stan Brakhage* (1963), in itself a one-minute film of a close-up of a man (Higgins himself) chewing an imaginary object. On the occasion attended by Mekas, projected on a loop, this was shown uninterruptedly from eight in the evening, and was still running at one in the morning when Mekas eventually decided to leave.²⁶ In addition to being used as a method of projection, the "loop" came to be applied to printing and editing. Pieces that started life as projected loops may be reprinted onto continuous film, as with George Landow's *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc.* (1965/66). The basic principle of reproducing the reproducible, of copying film again and again and splicing it together (be this a work in its entirety, a

²⁵ Hollis Frampton "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace and Hypotheses," *Artforum* 10 (September 1971), 32-35. 33 cited. For an account of technologies and practices of projection in early cinema see: Charles Musser, *History of the American Cinema*, vol. 1: *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Michael Chanan, *The Dream that Kicks: The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain* [1980] (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁶ Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 136. This entry is entitled "April 30, 1964: On Purity and on Anti-Art as Art."

sequence, or a fragment of a sequence) became a “formal device” popular with many avant-garde filmmakers.²⁷ Functioning, at some level, as a transposition of the micro-logic of frame repetition onto the larger scale of a sequence *of* frames, loop printing, employed extensively and insistently, constituted a way of experimenting with both repetition *and* cinema. This is apparent not only within Landow’s *Film in Which There Appear*, and the subsequent *Bardo Follies* (1967), but also, so to speak, “without” them. For where the sustained repetition of short clips of found footage is the governing principle of both – and re-cycling itself is also, in a way, a kind of repetition – they also both exist in multiple versions, “equivalent” in all but length. In these different versions, in fact, it is not so much *what* is being shown that varies, as *how long* – or how many times – it is shown for. So, just by varying the number of times the basic sequence is repeated, Landow has produced a five-minute and a twenty-minute *Film in Which There Appear*. This latter is also known as “Wide Screen Version” as, in fact, it is composed of two prints of the same material for simultaneous projection onto adjacent screens.²⁸ Similarly, there are several (progressively shorter) incarnations of *Bardo Follies*, developed throughout the years out of the initial forty-five minute film – with the most recent and, in Landow’s own view, “definitive print” being a seven-minute version made in 1978.²⁹

The repeated explosion of *Zabriskie Point* seems certainly to address, if not even to imitate, the sustained looping structures dear to the cinema avant-garde of the time. Yet, whilst it does so, it also, at the same time, negates them by *not* being a loop *of* film. For *Zabriskie Point*’s repetitions are also, in a way, not repetitions: where each reproduces the same instant, none of them is a duplication. As the scene

²⁷ Cf. Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1977), 108ff.

²⁸ Owen Land (formerly known as George Landow) and Mark Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land* (London: Lux, 2005), 116.

was captured with a battery of different cameras, in different places, neither actual footage nor, indeed, viewpoint ever recurs – though, of course, the recorded event is the same. Raymond Bellour considered this situation (without the specific reference to *Zabriskie Point*) in “Cine-Repetitions,” an essay of 1979 in which he set out to examine the various instances of repetition to be found in cinema.³⁰ While “repeating” at one level, that “of time,” whose identical instant is replayed again and again, Bellour notes how this form of repetition is not quite a return of the same.³¹ Indeed, as we see in *Zabriskie Point*, not only is there visual variation in the film itself, but the recorded moment as such is somewhat multiplied from within – a kaleidoscope of the instant. As it further emerges from the other “cases” Bellour goes on to analyse, difference seems to be inescapably part of cinema’s repetitions. For, in fact, not only does difference – in the incremental variations from one frame to the next – constitute the “look” of the filmstrip itself, but it also informs conditions and dynamics of projection, narrative structures and visual codes, up to the “institution” itself, “reproduced” historically yet subject to evolution. And so *Zabriskie Point*’s “differential” repetitions, too – its fake loops, so to speak – have quite a lot in common with the “real” loops of experimental filmmaking. For even those loops would not be identical to themselves, but would contain change: both intentionally and inevitably, evidently and *less* evidently.

For Le Grice, the loop offered precisely this opportunity for exploring and developing “transforming repetition.”³² In addition to staging the filmstrip, *Little Dog for Roger* is based on the recursive looping of a short sequence of home-movie footage (re-cycled, in fact, from the artist’s own childhood). This repeated sequence

²⁹ Ibid., 117-121. Meanwhile, *Bardo Folies* was re-baptized *Diploteratology*, because Landow thought it “a better name” (117).

³⁰ Raymond Bellour, “Cine-Repetitions,” trans. Kari Hanet, *Screen 20* (Summer 1979), 65-72.

³¹ Ibid., 65.

is “transformed” by variations in length, superimposition, and by being “frozen” at different moments and then set “in motion” again. A perhaps wider range of differentiation is at play in *Berlin Horse* (1970), in which the same sequence of a horse drawn around in a circle is presented in negative as well as positive, played backward as well as forward, modified by red, blue, green colour filters and flicker effects. These series of modifications are certainly immediately noticeable. By contrast with this differentiability, the film’s iconography, the horse with its repetitive circular movement, is strongly reminiscent of the unchanging loops (“the eternity of hurdling horses”) of proto-cinematic devices – whose theme *and* monotony the merry-go-round drone by Brian Eno accompanying the film both cites and enacts.

And, in fact, Le Grice’s array of changes is more than just cosmetic. The variations within the repetitions constitute a sort of outer sign of the “difference” inherent to repetition *as such* when considered from the viewpoint of time. In a way, they play out the dialectic that, in Kierkegaard’s view – and, in fundamental respects, in Gilles Deleuze’s re-appropriation, in the 1960s, of the Danish philosopher’s thought in *Difference and Repetition* – structures repetition itself.³³ “That which is repeated,” Kierkegaard maintains, “has been – otherwise it could not be repeated – but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new.”³⁴ What is repeated has, by definition, *been* and now *is* again. Therefore the intrinsic difference of repetition, its newness is, for Kierkegaard, a question of time or, rather, of the impossibility of “something” occupying the *same* time. At some level, this notion

³² Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 110.

³³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; Repetition* [both 1843, under pseudonyms], ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001). A few years before Deleuze, at his eleventh Seminar at the École Normale Supérieure in 1964, Jacques Lacan too had drawn on Kierkegaard for his own notion of “repetition,” which, however, is somewhat at the antipodes of Deleuze’s. See: Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1973], trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), esp. 61.

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 149.

finds dramatization in Le Grice's diversified loops, which literally make visible the fact that each repetition takes time and, indeed, takes *up* a different time (which is also, in this case, a different space on the filmstrip). In this respect, if the loops were, at a common sense level, aesthetically identical, each one would still differ from any of the other with regard to time.

In fact, even when the piece of film being screened is materially the same, as in the projected loop of Higgins' *Invocations of Canyons and Boulders*, each of its runs through the projector occurs at a different time. The footage's time (its one-minute length, and the time therein recorded, or "constructed" through editing), in turn, takes *another* time to unfold, the time of its screening. And as the cycles follow one another, Higgins' looped film shows this to occupy a longer and longer stretch, as in the five hours attended by Mekas. Thus we could also say that while the loop's time is being *reproduced* again and again, its accumulation *produces* a duration. This is the duration of the cinematic performance, for whose attendance, as Le Grice has recently noted, "the spectator (collectively the audience) gives time – invests a short period of life."³⁵ So in both *Little Dog for Roger* and *Berlin Horse*, the loop's variations can be seen to operate as a visible marker of the passage of the very time the audience "gives." In the absence of "narrative," they are the indexes of "the dramaturgy of a work unfolding across time."³⁶ But indeed, precisely *because* the "distraction" of narrative is absent – just as the "distraction" of music, as we have seen, is absent from Cage's 4'33" – it is "the material passage of time" *itself* that comes to the fore.³⁷ Whereas for Cage the audience could be made aware of time by silencing the music, for Le Grice this can similarly be achieved in cinema "by

³⁵ Malcolm Le Grice, "Improvising Time and Image," *Filmwaves* 114 (Winter/Spring 2001), 15-18. 18 cited.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 121.

reducing the information within the film” to bare essentials.³⁸ Thus the loops operate “in the rhythmic sense,” as a visual metronome or temporal scansion, which, however, being differential, also communicates something of time’s intrinsic unrepeatability.³⁹ For indeed, time itself, in Le Grice’s view, is not only “a ‘concrete’ dimension of cinema” – something cinema captures, re-presents and, even, materially embodies – but, in fact, “the dominant dimension of cinematic experience,” where time is *spent*.⁴⁰

So, ostensibly, here lies the contradiction. The film loop, a distillation of the principles of repetition and reproduction constitutive of cinema as such (as a technology *and* a practice), would naturally seem to incarnate an idea of time as inherently repeatable, or indeed, repetitive, as in Cioran’s notion of the “wrong eternity” of modernity.⁴¹ Devoid of apparent extrinsic changes – as the copied and re-copied clip in *Bardo Folies* – or, even, intrinsic ones, as with Higgins’ continuous projection, the loop could intuitively seem to manifest and, indeed, *reiterate* Bazin’s view that cinema “embalms” and “repeats” time, thus making time itself somewhat repeatable and reproducible.⁴² A projection-loop in particular displays and enacts the reversibility of film as such; its recursiveness could even be assimilated to the circularity of time the relentless revolution of the hands of the clock – considered in *absolute* rather than, in fact, as it normally is, in *relative* terms, designates. Yet, this repeatability of film that the loop makes plain would, in the 1960s, often be seen to manifest the unrepeatability of time, rather than its

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁰ Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 118; and Le Grice, “Improvising Time and Image,” 18.

⁴¹ Cioran, *The Fall into Time*, 174.

⁴² André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” [1945], in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14. Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon,” 68.

repetitiveness; its evanescence, rather than its permanence; its irreversibility, rather than its reversibility.

In fact, precisely *because* time comes to be understood as relative and multiple in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (within an “anti-Newtonian” model, as Smithson wrote, “time breaks down into many times”⁴³) its direction becomes tighter. Once it is no longer an absolute, homogeneous “ether,” equal at every point, but is understood as inextricable from the processes and substances which it is used to describe, then time itself comes to bear the signs, so to speak, of its own temporality.⁴⁴ These processes of relativization and multiplication of time are, in part, at once demonstrated and constructed through cinema itself. For cinema is *par excellence* a system of interlocking temporalities: the moments captured by the camera (a Barthesian “that-has-been” whether acted or not⁴⁵); the fictional time of the unfolding story; the length of the film and the duration of its screening (which, as we have noted, may differ); the time – as Le Grice puts it – “invested” by the audience. And cinema, though perhaps counterintuitively, is similarly implicated in the thought and embodiment of irreversibility.⁴⁶ Indeed, cinema’s technology itself could, and in the 1960s often would, be taken as “proof” of it.

In arguing for his “anti-Newtonian” view of time, Smithson did in fact start from the apparent disproof of irreversibility cinema would seem to afford. For, he

⁴³ Robert Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments”[1966], in Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 11.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. the Introduction.

⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* [1980], trans. Richard Howard (London: Random House Vintage, 2000). For a discussion of cinema, reality and fiction inspired by Bazin, see: Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [1971] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, enlarged edition 1979). For this point in particular, see the appendix: “More of the World Viewed” [1974], esp. 184.

considers, if we filmed an irreversible experiment, “we could prove the *reversibility* of eternity by showing the film backwards.” “But then,” he immediately counters, “sooner or later the film itself would crumble or get lost and enter the state of irreversibility.”⁴⁷ Certainly when, in the mid-1960s, Smithson wrote this, there was no short supply of contemporary avant-garde works demonstrating, and playing out, the “crumbling” of film.

In *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc.*, Landow self-reflexively appropriated technical footage, the “China Girl” of colour-density test patches, to display, among other things – including, in fact, the film frame itself – this very decay. Initially, as mentioned, the film was shown on a continuous loop. As the title announces, the “dirt particles” accumulating on its surface in this process are an integral feature of the work itself. The reference to signs of wear and tear draws attention to the fact that the more film is projected, the more it deteriorates – and the more frequently, the more rapidly; as, indeed, with the projected loops that were again becoming popular in those years. In fact, Landow himself, having shown this brief clip on looped projection for some time, had it reprinted on continuous film, albeit without repairing or cleaning away the dirt and scratches that had meanwhile accrued. So where the accumulation of “dirt particles” signals decay and temporal irreversibility, their “fixing” on the new print takes a “snapshot” of this very process from within, while also, of course, partly attempting to alleviate the problem. The following year, Landow presented more extreme deterioration in *Bardo Follies*. Indeed, here it seems that rather than trying to delay it, Landow, in a way, “accelerated” it by eventually burning the very footage whose

⁴⁶ Cf. Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), esp. chapter 4 “Temporal Irreversibility and the Logic of Statistics.”

recurrence the first part of the film is literally made of. At one point, in fact, this sequence of a waving woman – insistently repeated in space as well as time, appearing, as it does, not only sequentially, but also tripled across the split screen – is replaced by an image of melting celluloid. Some of the initial footage, as Landow explains, was “heated in a specially modified projector, projected and refilmed” from the screen, so that “the melting of the film engenders all of the subsequent ‘images.’”⁴⁸ A few years earlier, Nam June Paik, with perhaps the most minimal set-up possible, had also employed the repetitiveness of the loop to highlight the inevitability of erosion and the unrepeatability of time. His *Zen for Film* (1964) consisted of a loop of plain, unexposed film leader, destined to be projected again and again and allowed to collect dust and scratches until, eventually, it might become unplayable. This is a repetition in which “the image,” as Ina Blom has put it, “always changes” and is, in fact, the very imprint of the film’s own deterioration.⁴⁹ Intrinsically reversible – as, indeed, its abstract “imagery” could equally be played both forward and backward – *Zen for Film* nevertheless crystallizes the irreversibility of time itself. Dirt and scratches show that the loop’s repetitions are temporally cumulative: while the film rewinds back to the “beginning,” the time already past does not.

The film’s apparent “cyclicity” is therefore precisely that which would confirm Smithson’s conviction that things *do not* go “in cycles,” since on the contrary “there’s really no return.”⁵⁰ Indeed, “cinema,” Smithson suggest, offers at

⁴⁷ Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” [1967], in *The Collected Writings*, 74.

⁴⁸ See Lux online catalogue, <<http://catalogue.lux.org.uk/alphabetical/index.html>>, accessed 4 October 2005.

⁴⁹ Ina Blom, “Boredom and Oblivion,” in Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1998), 83.

⁵⁰ Robert Smithson, “Entropy Made Visible: Interview with Alison Sky” [1973], in *The Collected Writings*, 309.

best “an illusive or temporary escape from physical dissolution.”⁵¹ What for Bazin was cinema’s “exorbitant privilege” of “embalming” and “repeating” time is, for Smithson a “false immortality,” which “gives the viewer an illusion of control over eternity – but ‘the superstars’ are fading.”⁵² Thus from the material repeatability and reproducibility of film, to the repetitive structures and codes – such as those of the “star system” – of cinema as an industry and a cultural practice, cinema is for Smithson the embodiment of the “deceivingly” eternal revolutions of, and within, the universe as a whole. Indeed, perhaps it is as a reminder of this “fading” that Smithson’s own film, *Spiral Jetty* (1970) – among other things, a document of his earthwork of the same name – starts with a close-up on a still of the sun and its flares. As it prefaces the beginning of cinematic movement with the idea of its end in (and return to) stasis, is this “frozen” image also a sort of memento of cosmic cooling, of a time when even the apparently never-ending orbiting of stars and planets will have come to a stop?⁵³ Whilst some see the sun as “the giver of life [...] to me it is a portent of entropy, a kind of groaning circle of hot marmalade,” Smithson once explained: “I used a stock shot of the sun at the beginning of the film as what I would call entropic footage.”⁵⁴

For, indeed, the tightness of time’s direction is for Smithson both included within, and demonstrated by, the concept of entropy. This was a buzzword of the period – frequently invoked not only by Smithson, but also by a host of other artists, filmmakers, novelists, critics and scholars. And while entropy could be many things

⁵¹ Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” [1967], in *The Collected Writings*, 74.

⁵² Ibid. It is, also, probably more than accidental that this staged decay or even “death” of celluloid coincides with the introduction of video technology.

⁵³ In a recent article, Andrew V. Uroskie, drawing on Deleuze’s notion of the time-image, charts an affinity between time, and stillness, in Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* and Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962), by which Smithson had been fascinated. See: Andrew V. Uroskie, “La Jetée en Spirale: Robert Smithson’s stratigraphic Cinema,” *Grey Room 19* (Spring 2005), 54-79.

at once, and mean different things to different people – perhaps just because, as Smithson said, there were in fact many “different entropies” – a core meaning was nevertheless shared across this spectrum: that of functioning as a reminder of “The End.”⁵⁵ And so it is to entropy that we now turn.

Entropy

Smithson’s verification of what he calls “the irreversibility of eternity” *through* the technology of cinema is, so to speak, a “*counter-proof*” of it. For in the preceding paragraph he had in fact set out “to prove” it “by using a *jejune* experiment for proving entropy” (which, indeed, is the very experiment that, as we have seen, he contemplates filming).⁵⁶ Both these quasi-scientific demonstrations conclude Smithson’s presentation of industrial and construction sites around his hometown in “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967), and are in fact triggered by the last “monument” he describes: a children’s sand box. Whilst this object may seem thematically out of place, aesthetically it blends in with the other sites, photographed by Smithson with his Kodak Instamatic: like the others, it is deserted; and its metal frame could well be some kind of industrial ruin. More than recapitulating it, the sand box illuminates the whole article. For “[u]nder the dead light of the Passaic afternoon,” Smithson writes, “[t]his sand-box somehow doubled

⁵⁴ Kenneth Baker, “Talking with Robert Smithson” [c.1971], in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly et al., eds., *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 160 and 159.

⁵⁵ Robert Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master,” interview with Gregoire Müller [1971], in *The Collected Writings*, 256.

⁵⁶ Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” 74.

as an open grave.”⁵⁷ Thus it is this funereal image that inspires him to talk of, and “to prove,” the irreversibility of time *via* entropy:

Picture in your mind’s eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we have him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase in entropy.⁵⁸

Coined in 1865 by Rudolf Clausius, the term “entropy” somehow at once fixed and rendered culturally mobile the content of the second law of thermodynamics, which a number of scientists had elaborated through various experiments and formulations in the course of the nineteenth century. The second law established the principle of the dissipation of energy: in a closed system, when energy is turned into work, there is always some that escapes conversion and degrades into unusable waste, something that *cannot* be converted back into energy. Entropy is the measure of this degradation and waste, which, in a closed system – and the universe as a whole, too, is considered to be such a system – is inevitably bound to increase. Thus, given this – in many cases – verifiable irreversibility, one of the consequences of the law of entropy is a conceptualisation of time *itself* as irreversible: entropy, that is, functions as “time’s arrow.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, energy is

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See, among others: Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield, *The Arrow of Time: The Quest to Solve Science’s Greatest Mysteries* [1990] (London: Flamingo, 1991); Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man’s Dialogue with Nature* (London: Flamingo, 1984); Richard Morris, *Time’s*

thermodynamically measured as heat, which tends to distribute evenly across a given system. Therefore a decrease of energy and consequent increase in entropy also corresponds to a move towards thermal equilibrium – and, indeed, progressive cooling. In turn, since heat designates a state of high molecular movement, an increasing degree of entropy would mean a state of low, and eventually null, molecular movement.

Smithson sometimes drew on this strictly thermodynamics definition, as in his famous reading of minimalist sculpture as entropic. So, for example, Dan Flavin's neons are "frozen" action and Robert Morris's work "conveys a mood of vast immobility," "engulfed by many types of stillness: delayed action, inadequate energy, general slowness, an all over sluggishness."⁶⁰ The above example of the sand, however, is derived from the statistical reconceptualization of the term, which establishes entropy as the index of disorder of a system – and disorder, in turn, as the *more likely* development of a system over time than order. In thermodynamic terms, this means that in a condition of maximum entropy high-energy molecules (i.e. molecules possessing "heat," and therefore "mobile"), and low-energy molecules (colder and therefore slower, if not static) have thoroughly "mixed" within a system. Counterintuitively then, in this context the disorder of a system is greater when its degree of thermal – and kinetic – uniformity is higher. Thus the increasing evenness of the colour of the sand – its turning into overall greyness – is, somewhat paradoxically, the measure of its increasing chaos in entropic terms. Developed early on in the history of the concept – James Clerk Maxwell popularized it with a prosopopoeia in 1870, and Ludwig Boltzmann devised a formula for probabilistic quantification a few years later – this statistical interpretation became increasingly

Arrows: Scientific Attitudes Towards Time (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), on whose history

current as entropy entered “the information age.”⁶¹ Revamped by its application to information theories – ideas that, among others, the mathematician Norbert Wiener exposed for the layperson in his *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (1950; rev. 1954)⁶² – the term enjoyed a resurgence in the 1960s. Indeed, it is then that entropy became popular in the arts, if not even popularized through them, as in Thomas Pynchon’s almost “didactic” exposition in “Entropy” (1960), the short story providing the core ideas for his more famous *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966).⁶³

The science of communication systems championed by Wiener was based on the idea that the amount of entropy – disorder, or indeed, as it may also be called in this context, “noise” – of a system could somehow be managed (cybernetics comes from the Greek for “steerman”). Set in two separate flats within the same building, Pynchon’s novella uses the one below to illustrate cybernetic entropy – and the regulation, or lack thereof, of the transmission of information – and the one above for thermodynamic entropy. And ultimately it is the latter that “wins.” Downstairs, where a chaotic party with people of all sorts coming and going is in full swing, it proves possible to stall, if temporarily, the increasing disorganization of the system from a “communication” point of view. Yet, these measures appear futile in the face

and account of entropy I have also relied.

⁶⁰ Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 12, 14 and 19.

⁶¹ See: Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, eds., *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially Bruce Clarke, “From Thermodynamics to Virtuality.” For a study of the early development of statistics, see: Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶² Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* [1950], revised edition (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954). Another early exponent – and follower of Wiener – was the British William Ross Ashby, whose *An Introduction to Cybernetics* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1956), as opposed to Wiener’s discursive and philosophical justification of the discipline in *The Human Use of Human Beings*, provides a more technical presentation of its principles, aimed at practically promoting its interdisciplinary application. For a discussion of works concerned with the application of cybernetics as such, rather than entropic concepts derived from it, see: Edward A. Shanken, “Cybernetics and Art: Cultural Convergence in the 1960s,” in Clarke and Henderson, *From Energy to Information*.

⁶³ Thomas Pynchon, “Entropy” [1960], in *Slow Learner: Early Stories* (London: Cape, 1985); and Thomas Pynchon *The Crying of Lot 49* [1966] (London: Cape, 1967).

of what is revealed upstairs. There, in fact, the characters know that the problem is much larger: the world outside has been at a constant temperature for days. This is the “thermal equilibrium” of physics’ entropy, which, with respect to the universe as a whole, announces its ultimate “heat death.” Whereas, living in a sort of greenhouse, they have been keeping their windows and doors shut, the people downstairs, obviously, have not. Perhaps perceiving that steps of this kind to isolate themselves are merely a delay of the inevitable, one of the characters breaks open the window.

In fact, just as in Pynchon’s story “heat death” will have its way, so the optimism of Wiener himself about the effectiveness of cybernetics is underscored – and tempered – by his acceptance of the inevitable increase of thermodynamic entropy. Whereas the entropy of a restricted domain may successfully be controlled, at the universal level this power eludes us: thus ours can only be “a local and temporary fight against the Niagara of increasing entropy.”⁶⁴ And whilst, in Wiener’s view, this is no excuse for fatalism, entropy is nevertheless a “compelling” and “persuasive” “*memento mori*,” that communicates to us “the very true sense in which we are shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet.”⁶⁵ Even if adapted for the “information age,” this apocalyptic understanding of entropy remained pervasive – if not even prevalent. Certainly, it is this that Ballard evoked in his plethora of cataclysmic scenarios, from which – as well as, among other things, from Wiener’s ideas– Smithson himself drew inspiration.⁶⁶ Indeed, the “sluggishness” Smithson

⁶⁴ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, 134.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁶ An epigraph from Ballard’s *The Terminal Beach* opens Robert Smithson’s “The Artist as Site-Seer; or, a Dintorphic Essay” [1966-67], in *The Collected Writings*, 340. In this posthumously published text, referring to a number of other novels by Ballard, including *The Waiting Grounds* and *The Voices of Time* – Smithson draws on their eerie, devastated landscapes, and the presence of enigmatic “megaliths” therein. Quotes from both Wiener and Ballard appear in the collage of epigraphs around Smithson’s own main text in his “Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space,” originally published in the November 1966 issue of the *Arts Magazine*, now in *The Collected Writings*. Smithson also glosses

saw in Morris's sculptures is at some level cognate with the extreme lethargy Ballard describes in "The Voices of Time," probably a metabolic response to the coming end of the universe, for which one of the characters, Kaldren, gets a "live" countdown through a strange machine.⁶⁷ For, in fact, in Smithson's view, the work of Morris, Flavin, Judd, LeWitt and others functioned as a sort of countdown too: it "provided a visible analog for the Second Law of Thermodynamics," whose forecast is that "in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out."⁶⁸

Yet, if thermodynamic interpretations – with the cosmic "End" they seemed to postulate – provided the bottom line, the application of a concept of entropy to information theories was far from inconsequential. Though entropy had had cultural resonance from the outset – Henri Bergson, among others, tried to discourage pessimistic extrapolations in *Creative Evolution*⁶⁹ – its expansion in this direction promoted a wider, and wide-ranging, proliferation of the concept. In part, this is due to the fact that the various strands of information theory, cybernetics and systems theory emerging and developing in the postwar decades are based on an abstract definition of "system," designed, in fact, to be applicable to any type of phenomena, be they "natural" or "cultural."⁷⁰ In principle, almost anything can be treated, and

Wiener's views in "Entropy Made Visible," 302. Indeed, the inventory of Smithson's extensive library shows this to have contained classics such as P.W. Bridgman's *The Nature of Thermodynamics* (1941), as well as contemporary information-theory studies, such as, in addition to Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings*, John Robinson Pierce's *Symbols, Signals and Noise: The Nature and Process of Communication* (1961), and John Von Neumann's *Theory of Self-Reproducing Automata* (1966). For the complete list of Smithson's library, see: Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 297-345. Pamela M. Lee discusses links between Wiener's ideas and Smithson in *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), chapter 4.

⁶⁷ Ballard, "The Voices of Time."

⁶⁸ Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," 11.

⁶⁹ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* [1907], trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), 241-246.

⁷⁰ Whilst all these disciplines are at some level related, broadly originating within the field of mathematics in the wake of the development of artificial intelligence in the postwar decades, they are not totally congruent. Strictly speaking, "information theory" was founded by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in the late 1940s (see their *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949]). At about the same time, in 1945, Ludwig von Bertalanffy first

studied, as a system. And whereas these disciplines were essentially predicated on the limitation of entropy, one of the consequences of this kind of thinking was, ironically, its “multiplication,” as disparate systems might be seen to have their own kind of entropy – be it chaos or noise, waste or corrosion.

So just as time, as Smithson put it, was really “many times,” entropy became many entropies. Indeed, Smithson himself hoped some day “to compile all the different entropies.”⁷¹ For where “geology has its own kind of entropy,” “the current Watergate situation,” he elsewhere explained, was another “example.”⁷² And of course, as I have mentioned, art had its entropy too. Where, on his part, Smithson was particularly “interested in collaborating” with “geological entropy” in his own work, he saw parallel – if, we could say, “synthetic” – forms of it in contemporary art.⁷³ As well as in the “stationary” look of minimalist sculpture, he observed it in the strategies of contemporary avant-garde cinema, as in “the deteriorated images” of *Maxwell's Demon* (1968), Frampton's own tribute to the nineteenth-century physicist – and the fictional being the latter had introduced to explain entropy.⁷⁴ “After the structural film,” Smithson wrote – referring rather, it seems, to what the structural film *itself* left in its own wake, than to a phase of filmmaking after it –

announced his “general systems theory.” As he explained in the preface of his *General System Theory* – a collection of papers written in the arc of four decades, and first published in the US in 1968, and the UK in 1971 – “general system theory” is a “broad view that far transcends technological problems.” For Bertalanffy, systems theory represents “a re-orientation that has become necessary in science in general and in the gamut of disciplines from physics to biology, to the behavioural and social sciences and to philosophy,” where the increasing complexity of structures requires an “holistic” approach, a consideration of the organized “whole.” See: Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* [1968] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), xi. Ross Ashby (see above, footnote 62) was one of the founding fathers of both cybernetics and systems theory. For a discussion of systems theory and cybernetics in the art of the 1960s, Cf. Lee, *Chronophobia*, esp. 62-76 and 233-256.

⁷¹ Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master,” 256.

⁷² Ibid., and Smithson, “Entropy Made Visible,” 301.

⁷³ Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master,” 256.

⁷⁴ Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 11; and Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia” [1971], in *The Collected Writings*, 139.

“there is the sprawl of entropy.”⁷⁵ Though he does not mention them directly, it is also likely that he saw this in *Zen for Film*, as well as in the burning celluloid of *Bardo Folies*, in which, as P. Adams Sitney said, “the screen itself seems to throb and be consumed [...] the film itself seems to die.”⁷⁶

Only a few years earlier, Mekas and Max Kozloff had similarly noted – and appreciated – “the sprawl of entropy” in Antonioni’s films too. Reviewing *L’eclisse* for his *Village Voice* column in 1962, Mekas admired the general sense of deterioration and death exuding from people and landscapes alike in what, as some do, he liked to refer to as Antonioni’s “trilogy” (of *L’avventura*, 1960, *La notte*, 1961, and *L’eclisse*, 1962). With the same fascination for the decay of the new with which Smithson will write of Passaic, Mekas singled out how, in *La notte*, Antonioni lingered on “the walls peeling off as if touched by some radioactive disease” and “the rusty abandoned railroad tracks” of “the suburbs of modern Milan.”⁷⁷ Kozloff, on the other hand, was obviously thinking in cybernetic terms when he wrote that *Blow up* followed an “entropic format”: “the whole piece is a network of [...] dissipations,” in which “the central event submerges mysteriously within a welter of unforeseen ‘data.’”⁷⁸ It was indeed in alarm at this widespread courting of entropic processes – whether “thermodynamic,” “informatic” or, in fact, both – that Gestalt psychologist Rudolf Arnheim wrote *Entropy and Art* (1971), trying to argue, instead, for the pursuit of “good form” and “order.”⁷⁹ And, in a similar vein, it had actually been the contemplation of the relative rarity of “beauty” and “order” in the arts that

⁷⁵ Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia,” 139.

⁷⁶ P. Adams Sitney, “Structural Film” [1969] in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* [1970] (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 340.

⁷⁷ Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 51. The entry is entitled: “February 18, 1962: Antonioni and *La notte*.”

⁷⁸ Max Kozloff, “The Blow-Up” [1967], in Roy Huss, ed., *Focus on Blow-up* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), 63.

⁷⁹ Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

had prompted Wiener to make his more general – and pessimistic – remark on “the Niagara of increasing entropy.”⁸⁰

Another repercussion of this re-thinking of entropy in terms, or even just in the light of, information and systems theories is an understanding of systems as being not *as* closed as those of classical thermodynamics. One of the founders of systems theory, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, largely based his thought on the observation of biological systems – “open” *par excellence*, because reliant on the exchange of both matter and energy with their environment.⁸¹ In fact, in the second half of the twentieth century, even thermodynamics moved further away from the “ideal” of a closed system, with which – having essentially been developed for, and applied to, the study of engines and machinery – it had primarily been concerned at the outset. Notably, Ilya Prigogine applied thermodynamics itself to the analysis of the behaviour of open systems, in order to observe how their communications and exchanges with their surroundings enable them to *delay* thermodynamic equilibrium, maximum entropy: en route to entropic disorder, *even* order might arise, albeit randomly and temporarily. Indeed, it was precisely for his contributions to “non-equilibrium thermodynamics” through his study of “dissipative structures” that Prigogine was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1977.⁸²

So these different entropies ultimately highlighted not the “sealed” status of the systems to which they pertained but, on the contrary, their interconnectedness.

As systems come to be perceived as relative to each other and interdependent –

⁸⁰ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, 134. For a re-evaluation of entropic processes in the arts – including experimental filmmaking – of the 1960s and 1970s, see Yve Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

⁸¹ Von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, esp. chapters 5 and 6.

⁸² Working on irreversible processes since the 1940s, Prigogine had elaborated a “theorem of minimum entropy production” in 1945. Most of his fundamental research was published throughout the 1960s. See, for example: Paul Glansdorff and Ilya Prigogine, *Thermodynamic Theory of Structure, Stability and Fluctuations* (New York: Wiley, 1971). In 1984, with Isabelle Stengers, he published the popular science book *Order Out of Chaos*.

rather than autonomous and absolute –, so their various entropies are seen to be deeply imbricated. If for Smithson entropy summarized the “look” of a certain art, this aesthetic entropy, in turn, would function not so much as a “representation” of wider phenomena but would be aimed at revealing how the artwork itself *is* part and parcel of these very phenomena. Smithson, of course, made this quite evident with his own art. If the earthworks are by definition exposed *to*, if not indeed made *of*, materials and processes in the outer environment, Smithson’s *Nonsites* – an “*indoor earthwork*” – “transported” the outdoor inside the gallery itself, reproducing the actual site by “*analogy*” or “*metaphor*” (a map or a model), through the logic of the fragment (piles of rocks, sand, salt) or, as with the film of *Spiral Jetty*, the index.⁸³ As, built around this relationality and porosity of inside and outside, Smithson’s dialectic of site and non-site postulates the openness of systems – the notion of exchanges, traffic, from one to the other – it also suggests the idea of an equivalence between them.

Ballard vividly suggested this intertwining of, and equivalence between, “systems” – and indeed their entropies – in “The Voices of Time.” Through the terminals of his intergalactic telegraph, Kaldren receives not one but many accurate “diminishing mathematical progression[s],” from an array of celestial bodies.⁸⁴ Each of them is wiring through the time left to its own end, one of which also happens to coincide with that of the end of the universe itself. In Powers (the protagonist)’s eye, the discovery of these countdowns turns the starry sky into “an endless babel, the time-song of a thousand galaxies overlaying each other.”⁸⁵ The “countdown” to his

⁸³ Robert Smithson, “A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites” [1968], *The Collected Writings*, 364. On the *Spiral Jetty* film as “non-site” of the homonym earthwork, see: George Baker, “The Cinema Model,” in Cooke and Kelly, *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty*, 84ff; and Elizabeth E. Childs, “Robert Smithson and Film: The *Spiral Jetty* Reconsidered,” *Arts Magazine* 58 (October 1981), 68-81.

⁸⁴ Ballard, “The Voices of Time,” 33.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

own foretold death is measured with similar precision – indeed, by Powers himself, who also keeps an accurate diary of his fast shrinking periods of wakefulness. Ultimately, however, it would seem to be irrelevant that Powers’ own end is only three months away, while that of the universe is counted on a fifty-million-digit number. “Think of yourself in a wider context,” Kaldren tells him:

Every particle in your body, every grain of sand, every galaxy carries the same signature. As you’ve just said, you know what the time is now, so what does the rest matter? There’s no need to go on looking at the clock.⁸⁶

For Kaldren, that is – and as Powers, too, appears to realize – it is not so much the count of time that counts, or even the fact that each organism or thing has its own time, as the fact that each shares the inevitability of an entropic ending. As each individual end is inscribed within, and partakes of, “The End,” temporal irreversibility becomes that by which things – or indeed, systems – are “united”: different *yet* equal. In fact, this idea of body, sand and galaxy carrying “the same signature” resonates with the claim advanced by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* – even as Deleuze’s vitalistic emphasis may seem at the antipodes of Ballard’s apparent gloom. For in some respects the multiplicity in unity, or manifold “oneness,” that underscores Ballard’s story is also indeed what Deleuze celebrates in the concluding lines of his landmark book of the time: “A single and same voice for the thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of being for all beings.”⁸⁷ Ballard’s story of interlocking “ends” crystallizes

⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 304. For a discussion of univocity and multiplicity in Deleuze, see: Alain Badiou, in *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being* [1997], trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

how, as Bruce Clarke has put it, in the cross-over “from energy to information the concept of entropy initiated an ongoing shift away from the vision of a simple or homogeneous universe” and “toward a cognition of complexity,” in which phenomena are nevertheless “reunif[ied],” among other things, “in terms of a shared order of multiplicity and irreversible time.”⁸⁸

Irreversible and even, in a way, “linear,” time in Ballard’s story is, however, not “progressive.” Indeed, a great part of the allure entropy held during the period was due to the fact that it seemed to rid time of the idea of “progress.” For, if entropy proved the irreversibility and uni-directionality of time itself – but a uni-directionality that, structured by randomness and chance, as in the sand box of Smithson’s experiment, could entail a plurality of routes to the same “destination” – it also, in so doing, stripped time of its progressivist underpinnings. This is because, as Smithson put it, entropy is “evolutionary, but it’s not evolutionary in terms of any idealism.”⁸⁹

Frampton spelled out quite bluntly his conviction that entropy and progress are mutually exclusive:

art doesn’t progress, of course; we don’t progress either, we are just subject to more and more entropy, right? That’s the gist of the dust to dust business.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Clarke, “From Thermodynamics to Virtuality,” 27.

⁸⁹ Smithson, “Entropy Made Visible,” 303. Among the books in Smithson’s library, there was also Harold Blum’s *Time’s Arrow and Evolution* (1951), an attempt to argue that thermodynamics and biological evolution are not mutually exclusive, but that, in fact, even living systems obey the law of entropy. As for Prigogine, so for Blum “order” and “organization” can *randomly* arise en route to entropic disorder. Cf. Harold F. Blum, *Time’s Arrow and Evolution* [1951], 3rd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁹⁰ “Interview with Hollis Frampton,” *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), 44-77. 71 cited.

Entropy, here, is actually what for Frampton disproves “progress”: we do not progress *because* we are subject to “more and more” entropy. As we have seen, and for Frampton too, entropy is a question of degree, a measure; and one that is perceived to go on growing until a bursting point. As such, it can designate both this final state itself – whether a cosmic or a more localized “death” – and the incremental path to it, whose pace, indeed, may vary. It could be “infinitesimal,”⁹¹ as in the phenomena of geological erosion that attracted Smithson; more rapid, as in the burning to ashes of the photographs in Frampton’s *nostalgia* (1971); or, even, sudden and violent, as in the explosion in *Zabriskie Point*. So, whilst there cannot be progress, there is, however, still *process*. In both Smithson’s and Frampton’s understanding, entropy entails change, but only change that travels in the direction of destruction, of pulverization, of things turning “to dust”: a “system,” as Smithson put it, “deteriorates and starts to break apart and there’s no way that you can really piece it back together again.”⁹²

After all, this was a time in which – as entropy expanded from the realm of “energy” to that of “information” – “energy” itself came often to be coupled with the word “nuclear.” So, in *L’eclisse*, Antonioni had evoked nuclear energy’s potential for destruction as “the” constant – yet somewhat intangible – threat of the cold war. The newspaper headlines reading “The Atomic Age” and “Peace Is Weak” in the concluding sequence are rather direct evocations of it – and, with hindsight, have even been seen as premonitory of the mood of the Cuban missile crisis, which the making of the film preceded by a few months. Yet, a subtler sense of “looming, unidentifiable catastrophe” impregnates the film as a whole.⁹³ And in fact, from the very start, the modernist tower visible from the window of Riccardo’s flat (in

⁹¹ Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 13.

Rome's EUR district), is uncannily reminiscent of a mushroom-shaped cloud.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, however, the *actual* devastating effects of nuclear weapons could be physically seen – not only, of course, in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but, also, in the series of atomic-bomb tests carried out throughout those decades. And certainly the spectre of nuclear devastation, firmly rooted in the “collective imaginary” of the time, may partly be behind the irreparable pulverization both Frampton and Smithson evoke (Smithson specifically drew on the bomb-stricken landscape of Ballard's “The Terminal Beach” for one of his essays).⁹⁵ This sense of irrevocable disintegration is dramatically and violently rendered in *Zabriskie Point's* final scene, not only – or not so much – in the magnitude of the explosion itself but also, in fact, in its insistent return. For it is precisely *through* its cinematic repetition that the irreversibility of the explosion becomes manifest: the instant of destruction can be repeated many times but not “undone.” If anything, in fact, it is further magnified by being re-presented each time from slightly different angles.

If *Zabriskie Point's* blast summarizes entropy's destructive potential, it also, at the same time, shows it to be a universal “leveller,” as it is in Ballard's “The Voices of Time,” where entropic dissipation is the “signature” that makes things equal (*in* difference), and as it functions for Frampton and Smithson. The explosion “sends” a riot of disparate objects in a slow-motion flight into the sky. Books, corn flakes, clothes, roast chickens, flowers: all chaotically come to share the same space. While on the one hand the objects themselves might have escaped (if temporarily) the literal levelling of “dust,” their disorderly crowding of the sky also suggests a

⁹²Smithson, “Entropy Made Visible,” 301.

⁹³Ron Peck, “Chance Encounters,” *Sight and Sound* (December 1994), 61.

⁹⁴For a Lacanian reading of this tower, see: Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), esp. 117-118.

⁹⁵See footnote 66.

less literal kind of flight and of equalization: a flight from categories, a dissolution of hierarchies, a breaking through ranks. Certainly, at an obvious level, this blast is resonant, if not symbolic, of the students' and Civil Rights protests of the late 1960s, whose riots at a Californian university campus actually start the film, and provide the initial incident out of which the plot develops. Yet, more subtly perhaps, it was precisely this effect that Mekas had already appreciated in the entropic scenarios of Antonioni's "trilogy," by the end of which, as he wrote:

people stare into each other and their surroundings, and the surroundings and the objects stare back at them, with a cold, unmerciful eye. Man and objects have become equals – it is a terrifying state for man, but that's where he is.⁹⁶

And indeed, for Smithson, one of the fundamental operations of entropy was precisely this de-hierarchization, for in an entropic condition "all the classifications would lose their grids."⁹⁷ Irreversible and, at some level, "unidirectional" by definition, entropic disintegration would seem to eat up all traces of this very process in its own stride, leaving only a paradoxically chaotic uniformity, in which any boundary is abolished, and the very basis for identifying sense – as "direction" and even, possibly, "meaning" – is erased. Smithson's understanding of entropy in these terms resonates with Calvino's humorous account of the origin and development of the universe in twelve short tales in his *Cosmicomics* (1965), which in fact Smithson had in his library. For in Calvino's view, the "logic of cybernetics applied to the history of the universe" reveals – and, in this respect, as we have seen, Wiener himself would have agreed – its gradual degeneration into meaningless chaos.

⁹⁶ Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 76. The entry is entitled: "December 13, 1962: Antonioni and *L'eclisse*."

Eventually, Calvino writes, “events come flowing down without interruption, like cement being poured...a doughy mass of events without form or direction, which surrounds, submerges, crushes all reasoning.”⁹⁸

But this “doughy mass without form or direction” Calvino describes is, in the end, not very different from the “shapeless nebula,” “cold and dark” and without “any reference points” from which the universe itself sprang in the first place.⁹⁹ Similarly, rather than evolution minus idealism, entropy is actually, in Smithson’s view, more like an “evolution in reverse.”¹⁰⁰ And so it is for Frampton. Because, in proposing entropy as “the gist of the dust to dust business,” Frampton is not so much talking of a *turning* to dust of things, as of a *return* to it. Not just a “non-progressive” evolution, a process of pulverization by which things are levelled and rendered equal, entropy comes to seem like more of an *involution*, a regression to a former state reminiscent of the Freudian death drive. Entropy, the very embodiment of irreversibility and unrepeatability, is here *also* somewhat circular. But rather than negating irreversibility, this circularity – like that of the film loop – enmeshes with it and confirms it, for it is understood to be the very product of temporal accumulation. Strangely then, entropy is indeed perhaps a bit like a loop, where beginning and ending, a “sense of extreme past and future,” meet and become intertwined, if not even indistinguishable – as in “The Sand-Box Monument” of Passaic, which Smithson also calls “The Desert”; or, indeed, as in the desert itself.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysm, Is a Cruel Master,” 256.

⁹⁸ Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* [1965] (London: Picador, 1993), 93. There is perhaps an echo, here, with Smithson’s *Asphalt Rundown* (1969). This, the first of a series of works referred to as “flows,” or “pours,” consisted in realising a load of asphalt from a truck at the top of a hill in an abandoned gravel quarry outside Rome.

⁹⁹ Calvino, *Cosmicomics*, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 15.

Desert

But where is the horizon-line? Odd enough, this vast circling sea does not always know a horizon; it sometimes reaches up and blends into the sky without any point of demarcation.

John C. Van Dyke, *The Desert*¹⁰²

...the tire tracks in the sand, the old arastra by the gold mine's mouth, the grove where the station used to be, the shiny power pylons marching over the horizon, the old windmill in the canyon and the new telephone repeater on the peak, the Indian pictograph and the anti-war graffiti...

Peter Reyner Banham, *Scenes in American Deserta*¹⁰³

Smithson, Holt, and Van Dyke

For Smithson, the desert is the archetypal entropic space: *the place of time and its irreversibility*. Yet, his account (and physical pursuit) of the desert as the extreme embodiment of this condition, as the site of temporal accumulation and irreversibility *as such*, is deeply informed by – if not, indeed, largely dependent on – notions of circularity, roundness, gyration. As we shall see, he is not alone in thinking about the desert and time in these terms; in seeing the desert, that is, as a sort of “looping” space – and, as such, also intrinsically “cinematic” – which,

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² John C. Van Dyke, *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances* [1901] (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 55-56.

¹⁰³ Peter Reyner Banham, *Scenes in American Deserta* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 199.

paradoxically, can communicate the idea of time's irrevocability through a sense of circularity. Antonioni's own search for the desert, I will argue, also hinges on this. And in fact, Smithson's "desert" itself is, arguably, in part mediated *through* Antonioni's – in particular that of *Red Desert*.

Explaining the genesis of his monumental earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970; ill. 20, p. 348), a fifteen-foot-wide coil of earth and boulders extending for over fifteen hundred feet into the Great Salt Lake, Utah, this is how Smithson remembers his first encounter with the Great Basin Desert.¹⁰⁴ (A desert "more terrible than any desert in North America except possibly Death Valley. [...] Even the Mormons could do little with it," as Wallace Stegner wrote.¹⁰⁵) Smithson and his wife Nancy Holt – herself a land-art pioneer who will, in fact, use the Great Basin Desert as the location for one of her earthworks, *Sun Tunnels* (1973-1976) – have been driving west from New York. At one point, Smithson recounts, "the valley spread into an uncanny immensity unlike the other landscapes we had seen."¹⁰⁶ "Hills," he continues,

took on the appearance of melting solids, and glowed under amber light. We followed roads that glided away into dead ends. Sandy slopes turned into viscous masses of perception. [...] As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site

¹⁰⁴ Disappeared under water in the early 1970s, *Spiral Jetty* has re-emerged in 2002. Cooke and Kelly, *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty*, contains a portfolio of photographs of the site taken in the past three years. Smithson's earthwork is becoming an increasingly popular destination; in fact, so popular that the DIA Art Foundation in New York, in charge of the site's conservation, needs now to think of ways of avoiding its being looted away by tourists taking a part of it home as "souvenir." See: James Trainor, "This Is Your Land," *Frieze* 88 (January-February 2005), 94-97.

¹⁰⁵ Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* [1942] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 44.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty" [1972], in *The Collected Writings*, 145.

was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral. No sense wondering about classifications and categories, there were none.¹⁰⁷

“The site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness,” a “gyrating space,” a “spiral.”¹⁰⁸ Described as both circular *and* circling, round *and* rotating, coiled *and* coiling, it is the very nature of this desert site, in Smithson’s account, to produce – if not, even, to impose – the idea and the shape of his yet unrealized work. These attributes of the desert, meanwhile, are also inherently cinematic. “A film is a spiral made up of frames,” Smithson writes later on in the essay, crisply drawing an equivalence between his two *Spiral Jetty* – earthwork and film.¹⁰⁹ And indeed this idea of the film being an “analogue” of the sculpture, as Elizabeth Childs pointed out, is made explicit in the film’s final sequence, in which spirals of film dangling off reels surround a photograph of Smithson’s jetty on the wall.¹¹⁰ If the sculpture is a spiral *in* the desert that redoubles the spiral *of* the desert as such, this attribute

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 145-146.

¹⁰⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines rotary (adjective and noun) as “something acting by rotation (rotary drill, rotary pump).” So, with this word, Smithson is also alluding to the remains of oil-extraction structures visible on the site, abandoned after unsuccessful attempts spanning several decades, which he has mentioned earlier in the text.

¹⁰⁹ Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 148.

echoed from one to the other is also intrinsically cinematic. For Smithson in fact, the desert “belongs” to cinema. As the extended quotation above shows, and as George Baker recently noted, Rozel Point in the Great Salt Lake is lyrically described in terms of the “cinema-ized” site the artist had already outlined in “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic.” “A physical site,” Baker explains “taken over by the condition of the cinematic.”¹¹⁰ More than merely *looking* cinematic, for Smithson the landscape *is* a sort of giant projector. Not just bathed in “flickering light,” the place itself is actually a “rotary” – but a rotary whose oxymoronic combination of “fluttering stillness,” and “spinning [...] without movement” echoes the paradox at the heart of cinema itself.

In her description of *Sun Tunnels* (ill. 21, p. 349), Holt – if less overtly than Smithson – draws out a similar analogy between the desert site chosen for the work, the work itself, and cinema. Here, again, it is the “roundness” and “gyration” of the desert which seem to suggest the concept and form of the installation. The four tunnels, arranged in the shape of an X, as if radiating from a central circular “void,” echo and blend with the encircling “emptiness” of the site.¹¹² Furthermore, Holt points out, this is a place “only ten miles” away from “one of the areas in the world where you can actually *see* the curvature of the earth.”¹¹³ And in fact, the work levers on this enhanced “visibility” of both the earth’s curvature and its rotation that the “empty” vastness of the desert affords. The tunnels are oriented to the summer and

¹¹⁰ Childs, “Robert Smithson and Film: The *Spiral Jetty* Reconsidered,” 77.

¹¹¹ Baker, “The Cinema Model,” 95. “Noon-day sunshine,” Smithson wrote in “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic,” “cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an overexposed *picture*,” 70 (*italics in original*). Reynolds also discusses Smithson’s “cinema-ized site” in *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 103 and 223.

¹¹² The desert’s “emptiness” is, of course, relative. Whilst the topography of the Salt Lake area is certainly flat, bare, and desolate, one cannot say that there is “nothing” – or indeed, no human activity – there at all. Historically, much of the American desert has been host to military, or military-related operations and the Salt Lake area is no exception.

winter solstices. Whereas during those periods the sun shines straight into the holes (ill. 22, p. 350), throughout the rest of the year, and from day to night, the light, entering the tunnels at varying angles, “casts a changing pattern of pointed ellipses and circles of light.”¹¹⁴ This effect is both amplified and modified by a number of smaller holes that have been opened along the solid structure of the tunnels themselves. “There are times,” Holt explains, “when the sun is directly over a hole and a perfect circle is cast.” On these occasions, inside the pipes the effect is that “day is turned into night, and an inversion of the sky takes place: stars are cast down to earth, spots of warmth in cool tunnels.”¹¹⁵ This inversion is in turn “reverted” by “looking up through the holes on a bright night.” With stars and moon framed within their diameters, it “is like seeing the circles of light during the day, only inverted.”¹¹⁶ At an obvious level, *Sun Tunnels* is certainly “about” the solar year, and the desert as a privileged site from which to observe and become aware of “the sun rising and setting, keeping the time of the earth.”¹¹⁷ Yet, more subtly, Holt’s work is also “about” the desert *itself*, whose own rotating circularity it replicates and embodies. For the game of inversion between earth and sky Holt insists on in relation to *Sun Tunnels* is cognate with the illusions that the desert as such engenders, whereby “the earth, reflected upside down in the heat,” comes full circle with the sky. At her chosen site in particular “the mirages are extraordinary,” she enthuses: “you can see whole mountains hovering” upside down in the air.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Nancy Holt, “*Sun Tunnels*,” *Artforum* 15 (April 1977), 32-37. 34 cited, my emphasis. Lucy Lippard discusses *Sun Tunnels* in *Overlay: Contemporary Art and Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 106-107.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

Meanwhile, the thought of these inverted images the desert “projects” onto the sky strikes us as being deeply cinematic. And so is, too, the “chiastic” mimicking of this effect that the casting of lights and shadows through the tunnels’ various holes produces on their internal surfaces. “Real-time filmic spaces” (in which “points of light slide imperceptibly around the inner surface as the sun travels from horizon to horizon”), is how James Trainor saw the tunnels’ “dark interiors” on a recent visit. With the holes “creat[ing] something like a pin-hole camera,” *Sun Tunnels* is described as at once a film – unfolding in the arc of the day – and a place a bit like a cinema – a cosy “oasis of focus” in the “vastness” of the desert, dark but for the projector-like beams of light filtering through the pipes.¹¹⁹ And so it is this “real-time filmic space” that *Sun Tunnels* (1978), Holt’s celluloid film of her earthwork, replicates *in synthesis*. Sped up through time-lapse photography, the film takes us through a day’s cycle in less than half an hour, just as the spaciousness of the desert site comes to be “enclosed” within its circumscribed “spiral made up of frames” (to use Smithson’s definition of film as such).¹²⁰ Reflected – if not also, in fact, reproduced – in the concrete tunnels, the circular and revolving space of the desert finds further reverberation in the forms and dynamics of the cinematic.¹²¹

Through their emphasis on illusions and reflections, their metaphors of roundness and circularity, and of a movement at once rotatory and elliptical – or even spiral – both Smithson and Holt present the desert as a space in which

¹¹⁹ James Trainor, “A Place in the Sun,” *Frieze* 77 (September 2003), 56–57. 57.

¹²⁰ Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 148. Nancy Holt herself has stressed the “cinematic quality” of her work in general. For example, talking of her wrought iron structures – such as *Inside/Outside* (1980), and *Annual Ring* (1980/81), she has said that “they spin.” “That’s one of the strongest aspects of that Washington piece [*Inside/Outside*]. Two roads come together there and, when you drive or walk by, the work spins optically because of the bars going round. It sets up a kind of cinematic quality; it’s like you’re seeing frames of the landscape go by.” Micky Donnelly, “Nancy Holt Interviewed,” *Circa: Contemporary Art Journal* 11 (July/August 1983), 4–10. 8 cited.

¹²¹ Given their remoteness, of course, both *Spiral Jetty* (which furthermore, as mentioned, has only recently become visible again) and *Sun Tunnels* are mostly known precisely *through* their photographic and cinematic representations.

distinctions collapse, opposites merge. As for Holt sky and earth chase and merge into each other, so for Smithson, as we have seen, “the shore of the lake” becomes “the edge of the sun,” and solid and liquid become confused as the mainland appears to oscillate as if rippled by waves whilst “the lake remain[s] rock still.”¹²²

Their recourse to these figures echoes Van Dyke’s description in the epigraph at the beginning of this section. For, in fact, in Van Dyke’s account too, the “vast circling sea” of the desert sometimes even cancels out the horizon-line itself, “reach[ing] up and blend[ing] into the sky without any point of demarcation.”¹²³ A librarian and art historian, Van Dyke had set off for the American deserts in 1898. Starting from Colorado, and travelling alone – by train, on a pony, on foot – he re-emerged approximately two and a half years later. Largely written “on the road,” and published in 1901, *The Desert* is not so much a memoir of this journey, as a lyrical account of the landscapes encountered. Reprinted until the 1920s, this small volume then went out of print for a few decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, when ecological movements “rediscovered” the desert, it became something of a cult text, and has since gone through various republications.¹²⁴

Van Dyke’s and Smithson’s – or even Holt’s – aesthetic outlook, and their motive for pursuing the desert, may be widely different, if not even antithetical. As Alessandra Ponte has suggested, whilst for Van Dyke the desert was a quintessentially optical domain, indeed, “the house of light and colour”(as he himself put it, “the desert air is practically colored air”¹²⁵), for Smithson it was rather the

¹²² Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 146.

¹²³ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 55-56.

¹²⁴ For biographical notes on Van Dyke, see Peter Wild’s introduction to *ibid.* See also Richard Sheton, “Introduction,” in John C. Van Dyke, *The Desert* [1901] (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Inc., 1980). For a discussion of Van Dyke and his book, see also Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta*, 155ff; and Alessandra Ponte, “The House of Light and Entropy: Inhabiting the American Desert,” *Assemblage* 30 (August 1996), 12-31.

¹²⁵ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 87.

place of entropy.¹²⁶ Yet, these differences notwithstanding, all three describe the desert as a space of ambiguity and ambivalence, a place where boundaries are erased and difference is paradoxically both eliminated *and* preserved.

For Van Dyke, in the desert sand is a veil that spreads over everything:

The shifting sands! Slowly they move, wave upon wave, drift upon drift; but by day and by night they gather, gather, gather. They overwhelm, they bury, they destroy, and then a spirit of restlessness seizes them and they move off elsewhere, swirl upon swirl, line upon line, in serpentine windings that enfold some new growth of fill in some new valley in the waste.¹²⁷

On the one hand, this veil of sand, relentlessly and indiscriminately covering anything and everything, may make of the desert a space of temporal and spatial repetition. In Frank Norris's *McTeague*, a novel whose story culminates in Death Valley – and, published in 1899, actually contemporary with Van Dyke's own journey – the desert is indeed described in such terms: as an “infinite” spread “laid [...] out like an immeasurable scroll unrolled from horizon to horizon.”¹²⁸ Yet, for Van Dyke, this does not mean that the desert is just sameness, everywhere and always. On the contrary, the desert is articulated both spatially and temporally, only not in the terms one may usually expect. Precisely because there is nothing “to hold the sands in place,” “the surface of the desert is far from being a permanent affair,” everything is always “shifting,” being “overwhelm[ed],” “buri[ed],” “destroy[ed].”¹²⁹ And indeed, the entirety of his book is dedicated to analysing, distinguishing and

¹²⁶ Ponte, “The House of Light and Entropy,” 21.

¹²⁷ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 28.

¹²⁸ Frank Norris, *McTeague* [1899] (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 425.

¹²⁹ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 28-29.

drawing out nuances within this apparent sameness. In fact, even in *McTeague*, the “horrible monotony” of the desert is also, at the same time, a state of extreme disorder, a “chaotic desolation.”¹³⁰

Of course, we may think back, here, to the condition of maximum disorder the increasingly uniform greyness of the sand represents in Smithson’s theoretical experiment, spurred by the “model desert” of Passaic’s sandbox.¹³¹ And, for Smithson, the actual desert is a similarly oxymoronic space, monotonous *yet* random and chaotic. At a point in his essay on the *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson draws an accurate list of what can be seen from each and every point of the compass from its centre:

North –Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

North by East – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Northeast by North – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Northeast by East – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

East by North – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

East – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

East by South – Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water¹³²

And so on. Especially when seen from above, redoubled by the surrounding lake, which functions as “a vast thermal mirror,” this disordered uniformity is “dizzying.”¹³³ As wherever one turns “mud, salt crystals, rocks, water,” is all that can be observed, in this “rippling stillness” even the sense of direction falters.¹³⁴ Whilst using spatial co-ordinates, Smithson’s list at the same time undermines them:

¹³⁰ Norris, *McTeague*, 425 and 439.

¹³¹ Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” 74.

¹³² Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 149.

¹³³ Ibid., 148 and 149.

“[f]rom the centre of the *Spiral Jetty*” they become somewhat meaningless, impossible to discern, useless.¹³⁵ Holt, too, drew on the directionlessness of the desert. Before discovering the Great Basin Desert, Holt had been fascinated by the desolate wilderness in southern New Jersey called Pine Barrens, which, as she said, in a way “begins to approach that kind of Western spaciousness.”¹³⁶ And in 1975 she made a film of it, *Pine Barrens*. Here, Holt tracks the vastness of that landscape with her handheld camera, but without ever offering a panoramic view. As she walks, what we see is either the expanse of sand (and sometimes trees) in front of her, when the camera points forward, or below, as she tilts it to the ground just ahead of her feet. Thus, the restricted visual scope of the film, that withholds an “establishing” shot, or any kind of co-ordinate through which to construct and orient ourselves in the space being depicted, at some level incarnates the very directionlessness of the desert it reproduces. Moreover, this quality of the space is being praised by the voices of the local people that can be heard off-screen. They explain why they prefer Pine Barrens to the city, how they like walking in its emptiness, where, as one of them says, there is “no direction whatsoever.”

The “directionlessness” of the desert is temporal as well as spatial. Yet, the desert’s lack, or erasure, of temporal directionality, is not seen to be incompatible with the fact that, at the same time, the desert itself is, *par excellence*, the space that *displays* time. As Holt herself puts it,

“Time” is not just a mental concept or a mathematical abstraction in the desert. The rocks in the distance are ageless; they have been deposited in

¹³⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁶ Holt, “Sun Tunnels,” 34.

layers over hundreds of thousands of years. “Time” takes on a physical presence.¹³⁷

Certainly, to see the desert as spatialized time, and as the embodiment of irreversibility, is a common enough view. Writing in 1859 about the Colorado Sage Plain, the geologist J.S. Newberry noted that “the mind is awestruck in contemplation of the magnitude of the element of time” presented by “these stupendous monuments of erosion.”¹³⁸ More recently, Jean Baudrillard described Death Valley as “a geological epic”: “everything the earth has ever been, all the inhuman forms it has been through, gathered together in a single anthologizing vision.”¹³⁹ The desert is “a matchless spectacle” of time – or indeed, of “the depth of time,” presented to us “in synthesis, in a miraculously abridged version.”¹⁴⁰ Precisely because of this visualization of time, the desert, for Baudrillard too, is essentially “cinematic” – in fact, he points out, it was thus long before actual cinema “came on the scene.”¹⁴¹ But whilst Baudrillard seems to emphasize the idea of an ordered, *chronological* display (a miraculous abridgement), for Smithson and Van Dyke and, partly, for Holt, the way in which the desert exhibits time is far from being orderly, or chronological. For them, in fact, it is precisely the desert’s lack of spatial coordinates, its state of chaotic uniformity, which manifests time, but *without* – or, in fact, “*after*” – the arrow. Like the “model desert” adduced by Smithson to demonstrate entropy, the real desert displays time in its irreversibility by, paradoxically, embodying the clouding over, if not the disintegration, of the very directionality subtending this process. Overtly, for Smithson, time in the desert is

¹³⁷ Holt, “Sun Tunnels,” 34.

¹³⁸ Quoted by Reyner Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta*, 137.

¹³⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *America* [1986], trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), 69 and 68.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

indeed time as seen from the apex, if not the end, of entropy – a condition in which, as we have seen, “all classifications would lose their grids.”¹⁴²

Van Dyke does not mention entropy. Yet, whereas for him the desert is the very incarnation of the time of the earth, this manifests itself as havoc. For whilst “all strata and all geological ages” are revealed in its “many kinds of splintered and twisted rocks,” these very strata and ages are all muddled up, “blown into discord” by the action of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, water and wind.¹⁴³ Similarly, for Smithson, “the strata of the Earth” the desert exposes are “a jumbled museum.”¹⁴⁴ But it is not only geological time that the desert at once displays *and* jumbles, making it both a “physical presence” (as Holt puts it) *and* “directionless.” For, in fact, the desert exhibits and confounds human time too. Towards the beginning of his book, Van Dyke describes coming upon the ruins of what might once have been a fort. Yet, dating these remains is arduous. “A geologist,” Van Dyke muses, might think them “an illustration of the Stone Age,” “an iconoclast,” might argue they are “merely a Mexican corral built to hide stolen horses,” whilst “a plain person of the southwest” would probably see them as “an old Indian camp.”¹⁴⁵ Since the materials the builders used are those of the desert itself, now further transformed and eroded by its winds and sands, Van Dyke concludes that there is, in fact, no sure way to tell. Thus, he suggests, in the desert “[t]he man of the Stone Age exists to-day with contemporary civilized man. Possibly he always did.”¹⁴⁶ So, for Van Dyke, the desert obfuscates or even, indeed, “undoes” human chronology, seemingly making cave and contemporary man at once adjacent and indistinguishable.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴² Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master,” 256.

¹⁴³ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 37.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects” [1968], in *The Collected Writings*, 106.

¹⁴⁵ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 11.

The extreme proximity of temporally-distant eras, the touching – if not the fusion – of past and present that Van Dyke reads in the topography of the desert, is echoed in both Holt's and Smithson's accounts. Whilst Holt may not mention the "disorder" of geological layers, she describes the area surrounding the site chosen for her *Sun Tunnels* as a hotchpotch of human epochs. "Old trails, crystal caves, disused turquoise, copper, and tungsten mines, old oil wells and windmills, hidden springs, and ancient caves," she writes, all confusedly blended together, "coated with centuries of charcoal and grease," or "filled [...] with residue – mostly dirt, bones, and artefacts."¹⁴⁷ Smithson's gaze is more oxymoronic. To his eyes, the muddled contiguity of pasts and presents engenders not simply a fusion, but a reversal. Thus, by the Great Salt Lake, he is "transported [...] into a world of modern prehistory," in which it is the present that comes to look like an extreme past.¹⁴⁸ It is, that is, "the trapped fragments of junk and waste" caught in the vast "expanse of salt flats," "two dilapidated shacks," "a tired group of oil rigs," and "pumps coated with black stickiness rust[ing] in the corrosive salt air" to look prehistoric. At once discernible and "lost in those expansive deposits of sand and mud," they look like the imaginary "products of a Devonian industry," or "the machines of the Upper Carboniferous Period."¹⁴⁹

This idea of a space of temporal confusion and overturn is recurrent in Smithson. On another occasion, for example, he had similarly defined some slate quarries in Pennsylvania as a place in which "the present fell forward and backward into a tumult."¹⁵⁰ Though not a recognized "desert," these Pennsylvanian quarries are nevertheless described by Smithson in the same terms (an "ocean of slate," "a

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Holt, "Sun Tunnels," 34.

¹⁴⁸ Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 146.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 145-146.

petrified sea” that seems “to swarm around one”) he employs for the more canonical American deserts, such as, indeed, the Salt Lake area.¹⁵¹ Holt, as we have seen, does the same with New Jersey’s Pine Barrens. What is, or what makes a desert is far from straightforward, as Banham has observed: in fact, rather than having the definition of desert, he argues, “all deserts are desert by definition.”¹⁵² Both Banham and Smithson would agree that the desert is not so much an incontrovertible physical entity as a malleable conceptual reality. For his part, Banham ultimately sees the desert as an often equivocal “value judgement [...] of, and about, people.”¹⁵³ In fact, whilst deserts are typically thought of as people-less places, the opposite is true: from industrial and military plants to tourism – including indeed land-artists and their “fans,” about whom Banham is somewhat sceptical – American deserts, at least, are thoroughly inhabited. For Smithson, on the other hand, “the desert is less ‘nature’ than a concept [...] that swallows up boundaries,” including, of course, those that, so to speak, keep time.¹⁵⁴ As before and after converge on the same plane, “traces of an end or a beginning” may become undecipherable, if not even disappear.¹⁵⁵ As such, Smithson’s desert corresponds to Calvino’s universe in the *Cosmicomics*; a “space” to which, conversely, Calvino sometimes assigns the topography of the desert itself: “with crevasses and dunes,” “winding canyon[s],” “cactus’s thorns,” and a “void” as “stony as the bed of a dried-up stream”.¹⁵⁶ Here, “past and future” are “vague terms,” and it is hard to “make much distinction

¹⁵⁰ Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind: The Earth Projects,” 110.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 110-111.

¹⁵² Banham, *Scenes in American Deserts*, 204.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 205.

¹⁵⁴ Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” 109. Ina Blom makes a similar point in relation to the concept of entropy for Fluxus, in “Boredom and Oblivion,” 70.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 111. Describing his “Non-Site” of the Pennsylvania quarry mentioned above, Smithson characterizes it as “a fragment of a greater fragmentation [...] where] there are no traces of an end or a beginning.” Cf. Ponte’s discussion in “The House of Light and Entropy.”

¹⁵⁶ Calvino, *Cosmicomics*, 122.

between them,” since “what might have been before” is “confounded with the future.”¹⁵⁷

Just as the desert is a bit like the cinema – cinematic long before cinema itself, as it is for Baudrillard, or a place of “gyration,” reflections and illusions, as it is for Smithson and Holt – so cinema is a bit like the desert. For cinema, too, is a “jumbled museum”: a space where temporal “disconnections” and “fragments” converge, “a chaos of ‘takes,’” as Smithson put it à propos his own film *Spiral Jetty*, “trapped in [...] a stream of viscosities.”¹⁵⁸ The hotchpotch of, and ambiguity between, different times characteristic of the desert is also, of course, a quality of cinema *par excellence*, where continuous temporalities are dismembered and re-arranged in a different order, and epochs historically remote from each other may come to be spliced, if not fused, together.¹⁵⁹ Both Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* and Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* films rely on this power of editing to re-organize and “jumble” time. Where Holt condenses a day into half an hour through time-lapse photography, Smithson’s film stages a continuous movement forward and backward in time, as the film oscillates between evoking prehistory and “documenting” the recent past of making the jetty: “The moviola becomes a ‘time machine’ that transforms trucks into dinosaurs.”¹⁶⁰ But if the shots of the road leading to Rozel Point— where images of stretches ahead of the truck are alternated with images of stretches behind it – allude to the film’s hopping back and forth in time, they also replicate what is already a cinematic quality of the desert as such. For in Smithson’s view the desert itself has an equivalent power, being able, as we have seen, to turn contemporary oil rigs and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁵⁸ Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 150. Cf. Michael Ned Holte, “Shooting the Archeozoic,” *Frieze* 88 (January/February 2005), 78-80, a reading of the film *Spiral Jetty* as a “time machine.”

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Eva Schmidt, “Et in Utah Ego: Robert Smithson’s ‘entropologic’ cinema,” in *Robert Smithson: Zeichnungen aus dem Nachlass/Drawings from the Estate* (Münster: Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe Westfälisches Landmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1989), 53.

pumps into prehistoric “machinery.” The “disparate elements,” “unlikely places and things,” “stuck” together in the *Spiral Jetty* film “recapitulate” the desert site itself, in which distant times converge and merge.¹⁶¹ Therefore, indeed, the relationship between cinema and desert emerges as one of deep analogy, or homology.

The “gyration” they share may function as an index of the passage of time, whereby the irreversibility of time is conveyed *through* the “accumulation” of repetition, circularity, cyclicity. So, the revolutions of film in the projector may be in some way equivalent to the revolutions of the earth the “emptiness” of the desert makes visible, and that – for instance – *Sun Tunnels* at once echoes and brings into relief. But even as they mark time’s unfolding, the “gyrations” of both cinema and the desert challenge the idea of time’s “course,” engendering a space of temporal ambivalence. It was this sense of a looping space, of temporal a-directionality and ambiguity, that attracted Antonioni to the desert, both as a geographical entity *and* as a mental, or indeed, a cinematic “chronotope.”¹⁶²

Antonioni, and Smithson

Interviewed after the release of *The Passenger* (1975), which begins and ends in the North African desert, Antonioni explains the choice of that location as “a need to escape [...] from the historical context” in which he and the characters lived – “that

¹⁶⁰ Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 150.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁶² Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “chronotope” in “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” [1937-38], in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Drawing on Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, Bakhtin coins the term “chronotope” to indicate “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” “In the literary artistic chronotope,” he continues, “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope” (84).

is, the urban, civil, and civilized context.”¹⁶³ In this account, the desert would seem to be temporally ambiguous because *outside of* human history and civilization – a place of primordial timelessness. This romanticized picture, however, is not borne out by the film itself. For there, in fact, the desert is a very “busy” place: a place in which one encounters “civilization,” and in which “history” happens (namely, here, arms trafficking, guerrilla, civil war). And so, Antonioni’s physical pursuit of the desert, and the cinematic image of it he constructs, are much less naïve and far more complex than this throwaway comment suggests.

It is indeed after *The Passenger*, that, noting the recurrence of the desert in Antonioni’s films, Pascal Bonitzer commented on Antonioni’s “obsession” with it.¹⁶⁴ In his view, *Red Desert*, *Zabriskie Point*, *The Passenger* – films in which the desert is explicitly a theme, if not a place — are part of what he sees as Antonioni’s “project” since *L’avventura*: “the empty, the de-peopled shot.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, for Bonitzer, “desert” in Antonioni designates emptiness, “the void,” that which, as in *L’eclisse*, leads to “the eclipse of the face, the obliteration of the characters.”¹⁶⁶ However, there is always *someone* in Antonioni’s deserts. Where one may say that in any case there would always at least be the camera framing the desert as a “view,” more often than not there are actually people *in* them – be these the urban desert of *L’eclisse* or the “real” ones of Death Valley or North Africa.¹⁶⁷ So, whilst the protagonists might have disappeared from the urban landscape of *L’eclisse*’s last sequence, anonymous city dwellers still populate the scene – and the camera seems indeed “attracted” by

¹⁶³ Alberto Ongaro, “Una ricerca nel profondo” [interview with Antonioni, 1975], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 307.

¹⁶⁴ Pascal Bonitzer, “Désir désert (*Profession reporter*),” *Cahiers du cinéma* 262/263 (January 1976), 96-98. 96 cited.

¹⁶⁵ Pascal Bonitzer, *Le Champ aveugle: Essais sur le cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 88.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ For a discussion of this point see: Edward Dimendberg, “Beyond Cinema: Space, Time, and Entropy in *Zabriskie Point*,” *Paragrana* 7 (1998), 241-249. 245 cited.

their everyday activities. Not only, in *Zabriskie Point*, is the Californian desert the stage of Daria's and Mark's brief romance, but in the famous (and for the time scandalous) love-in sequence, Death Valley becomes a rather crowded place, as a myriad of other couples appears dotted here and there on the sandy dunes. Given this crowding, could it be that the desert, in Antonioni's films, is not quite – or not just – a sign of emptiness, absence, “void”?

Throughout the 1960s, the lack of “dramatic line” – as he called it – became a constant of Antonioni's films (as indeed, of course, of those of a number of his contemporaries).¹⁶⁸ In this respect, *Red Desert*'s “return” of the end to the beginning – as, both diegetically and visually, the film's finale strongly echoes its opening – makes apparent his tendency not only to do away with “dramatic line” but in fact, also, to replace it with a sort of loop. If *Red Desert* is surely the immediately remarkable example, from *Il grido* (*The Cry*, 1957) onwards almost all of Antonioni's films have a looping structure – whether narratively, visually, or indeed both.

Bookended at each side by a scene at the village refinery tower where he works, Aldo's picaresque journey in *Il grido*, is both a “loop” and a “traditional” – if not, in fact, an “archetypal” – story. While the end dovetails with, and mimics, its beginning, there is still a clearly perceptible “dramatic line” in its plot. Since Aldo doesn't simply return atop the tower to carry on working as before, but throws himself from it, the end maintains the conventional attributes of a “closure.” By contrast, “closure” is much more diluted, much less “conclusive,” in *The Passenger* – despite the fact that, with the added twist of a change of identity, the film is in some way an intercontinental version of Aldo's more modest peregrinations around

the Po Valley. For, amongst other things, whilst *Il grido* ends with Aldo's death, *The Passenger* carries on *after* Locke's murder, the camera resuming its observation of life in – or in the villages at the edges of – the desert, with which the film started. Films like *L'avventura* and *L'eclisse* similarly have a circularity without closure. Rather than echoing the initial narrative situation, the concluding situation is actually equivalent to it: one film opens and closes with a couple trying to piece together their relationship, the other with the end of a love affair. In this context, the fact that by the end of the film one of the characters in the couples has actually changed matters little: in fact, this enhances, rather than undermines, the sense of circularity. Indeed, in an article on *Blow up* (another looping story, in which, visually too, the end – with the return of the group of mimes – strongly echoes the beginning), Marsha Kinder took this “interchangeability” of Antonioni's characters as a further proof of this. In her view, the true “protagonist” of Antonioni's films is not so much the specific content of people's stories as, rather, their almost inescapable formal circularity.¹⁶⁹

Antonioni himself seemingly corroborated this insight when he thus justified his propensity:

Today stories are what they are, they may have neither beginning nor end, be without key scene, without dramatic curve, without catharsis. They may be made of shreds, of fragments [...] like the life we lead.¹⁷⁰

Made in 1965, and thus between *Red Desert* and *Blow up*, this statement suggests that the striking “return” of these films' ends to their beginnings is, for Antonioni,

¹⁶⁸ Pierre Billard, “L'idea mi viene attraverso le immagini” [1965], in Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 129-130.

¹⁶⁹ Marsha Kinder, “Antonioni in Transit” [1967], in Huss, *Focus on Blow-up*, 86.

¹⁷⁰ Billard, “L'idea mi viene attraverso le immagini,” 129-30.

somewhat analogous to having “neither beginning nor end” – like, indeed, the seemingly infinite plane of the desert itself.

Could it not be then, that for Antonioni too, the desert is – physically, conceptually, cinematically – a space *of* time; and, more precisely, a space in which beginning and end become contiguous, confused, if not “fused”? The question Antonioni’s deserts insistently elicit is whether they designate a *pre-* or a *post-*human time. And the only answer to this seems to be that – short of providing the resolution to this doubt – they incarnate the very question, the very ambiguity.

Let us take the American desert of *Zabriskie Point*. Historically, many of the vast expanses of the American desert have been in the hands of the military, or host to military-related operations. The forbidding nature of their environment, and their remoteness, has made them an ideal place for this type of industriousness. Whilst from the centre of *Spiral Jetty* Smithson could see only “mud, salt crystals, rocks, water,” and, similarly, Holt appreciated the emptiness of her relatively nearby site, this does not mean that there was actually “nothing,” or nothing else, going on in that most inhospitable desert. Indeed, within a sixty-miles radius from *Spiral Jetty* and *Sun Tunnels* one finds, among other things: the airstrip from where *Enola Gay* took off en route to Hiroshima; the Thiokol Propulsion plant – a rocket-delivery factory active since the Cold War; the Tooele Army Depot, allegedly the world’s largest storage of chemical and biological weapons.¹⁷¹ Similarly, *Zabriskie Point*’s more spectacular Californian deserts (which, of course, cinema itself has partly rendered iconic, contributing to making them popular tourist destinations) are adjacent to the

¹⁷¹ Trainor points this out in “A Place in the Sun,” 56-57.

famous Nevada Test Site, where controlled nuclear explosions were carried out – and largely publicized – throughout the postwar period.¹⁷²

So, indeed, *Zabriskie Point*'s spectacular bang could evoke "the Bomb" with very concrete and immediate connotations – for an American audience at least. In fact, only a few years before Antonioni's film, the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely had exploited the same ideological and geographical associations for his *Study for the End of the World, No. 2* (1962). This consisted of a choreographed explosion, in the Nevada desert, of an intricate but primitive machine built by Tinguely himself with the most disparate "found" objects, metal scraps, junk and wires. By comparison with Antonioni's grand set-up and state-of-the-art technology, *Study for the End of the World*, in spite of the apocalyptic title, was a rather low-tech and DIY affair. Not only the machine, a fragile and precarious assemblage of oddities, but also the bombs were home-made by Tinguely himself; he even lit some of the dynamite during the blast. Broadcast on NBC television was, however, a constitutive part of the event: so that the work, particularly redolent of symbolisms at that specific historic conjuncture, attracted world-wide press attention.¹⁷³

¹⁷² In a recent article on 1960s American nuclear testing programmes, Alessandra Ponte shows how the literature produced at the time to defend their usefulness tended to sentimentalize and "aestheticize" them, drawing on the beauty – if not, indeed, the sublime qualities – of the explosions themselves. See: Alessandra Ponte, "Desert Testing," *Lotus International* 114: *Deserts/Deserti* (2002), 56-89. Among others, she mentions *The Effects of Nuclear Weapons*, a report by the US Department of Defence. This, first published in 1950 as *The Effects of Atomic Weapons*, went through various updates in the following decades – revised editions appeared in 1957, 1962, 1964 and 1977. Aimed to the lay public, the publication, as one of the editors puts it, "should permit the general reader to obtain a good understanding of the various topics without having to cope with the more technical details." In fact, in addition to fairly basic explanations, it does so with quite a lot of photographs, showing both a range of explosions (including underwater and underground ones) and their effects on buildings and infrastructure. Whilst some of these latter images are of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, most refer to the tests on residential structures carried out at the Nevada Test Site in 1953 and 1955, and systematically show the "before" followed by the "after." See: Samuel Glasstone and Philip J. Dolan, eds., *The Effects of Nuclear Weapons*, 3rd edition (Washington: United States Department of Defense and the Energy Research and Development Administration, 1977).

¹⁷³ For a detailed and compelling discussion of Tinguely's *A Study for the End of the Work*, see Lee, *Chronophobia*, 84-153, on whose account I rely.

Given Antonioni's declared indifference to notions of beginning and end, the desert of *Zabriskie Point* could therefore also be the space *left* by the explosion at the end of the film itself. It may designate futurity rather than – or in fact, indeed, *as well as* – pastness and primordiality. As well as a “chronotope” nearly ten-million-year old, *Zabriskie Point*'s desert could be the cipher of a very “new” time, or a time yet to come. But is *Zabriskie Point*'s ending just an allegory of impending catastrophe, its desert as such just a symbol of nuclear devastation – a “day after” scenario? And, similarly, is the dystopian world of *Red Desert* – with its layer of greasy slime covering earth and water, the fumes, the jarring yet washed-out colours, the looming giant skeletons of industrial infrastructure – just a memento of ecological cataclysm?

The worn-out and tired look of *Red Desert*'s futuristic present – as the child's robot, the aseptic spaceship-like hotel, the giant pylons “to listen to the stars” suggest – chimes with Smithson's journey to the “future [...] ‘out of date’” of Passaic.¹⁷⁴ The derelict industrial landscape around Passaic is for Smithson a “zero panorama,” containing “*ruins in reverse*, that is – all the construction that would eventually be built.” Contrary to “the ‘romantic ruin,’” here “buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin before they are built.”¹⁷⁵ That the dereliction Smithson encounters in his – as he calls it – “suburban Odyssey” may have an affinity with the world of *Red Desert* is not that surprising.¹⁷⁶ For both Antonioni and Smithson are evoking the *aftermath* of modernity's shocks; that moment which in a slightly different context, as we have seen, Patrice Petro defined as “aftershock.” Similarly to “afterimage,” as Petro suggests, the idea of aftershock still retains an element of shock, of dazzlement – like, indeed, “the noon-day sunshine” that

¹⁷⁴ Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic,” 73.

“cinema-izes” Passaic, or the whiteness of the fog that momentarily blinds Giuliana.¹⁷⁷ Like Smithson’s Passaic, the reality of *Red Desert* is industrial and already *post*-industrial, if not indeed, like a Ballardian scenario, *post-human* – a reality in which the frail and confused Giuliana seems at once a survivor from the past, and an inhabitant of a “backward looking future.”¹⁷⁸ Yet, interestingly, the wild, unliveable and un-industrializable site of *Spiral Jetty* (where, as Smithson points out, hopes to install a petrol-extraction plant, repeatedly curbed by “nature,” were finally abandoned) is evocative of *Red Desert* too. The red of its algae-coloured waters, the mud and rocks of the jetty itself resonate strongly with the red-stained waters and putrid mud of *Red Desert*’s polluted swamps.

These echoes between Smithson’s “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic,” *Spiral Jetty* and *Red Desert* re-enhance the confusion and ambiguity of times – geological, human – embodied by the desert as such. It is indeed possible that Smithson himself actually did have Antonioni’s film in mind when he wrote his “travelogue,”¹⁷⁹ or when he made the jetty. A keen and eclectic cinema-goer – who liked experimental and European auteur films as well as sci-fi B-movies – it is actually almost inconceivable that Smithson should *not* have seen *Red Desert*, given, besides, the esteem in which Antonioni was held by the New York “avant-garde” of the time.¹⁸⁰ And if Smithson did see it, *Spiral Jetty* becomes emblematic of how his

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Patrice Petro “After Shock/ Between Boredom and History,” in Patrice Petro, ed., *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 265 (I discuss this in Chapter 2). Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic,” 70.

¹⁷⁸ Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 15.

¹⁷⁹ Childs proposed this term for “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic,” in “Robert Smithson and Film,” 72.

¹⁸⁰ For Smithson’s “cinophilia” see, among others: Uroskie, “La Jetée en Spirale: Robert Smithson’s stratigraphic Cinema,” Baker, “The Cinema Model,” and Childs, “Robert Smithson and Film: The *Spiral Jetty* Reconsidered,” in addition to Smithson’s own “A Cinematic Atopia.” Mekas’s columns for *The Village Voice* are a clear indicator of Antonioni’s popularity. So, for example, whilst, unlike Antonioni’s previous films, *Zabriskie Point* ended up a financial and critical failure, Mekas notes that

reading of *Red Desert* goes against the grain of the references to a modernist pictorial model with which the film has often been aligned, and which Antonioni's own allusions to Rothko and Pollock partly corroborated.¹⁸¹ Like Mekas with *La notte*, and Kozloff with *Blow up*, *Spiral Jetty* would show that Smithson read *Red Desert* for its entropic drive. Indeed, *Spiral Jetty* can show *us* this now, even if Smithson himself had not seen the film, or was unaware of the way in which his work evokes it. With *Red Desert* in mind, the "natural" deserts of *Spiral Jetty* and *Zabriskie Point*, and the "industrial" ones of Passaic and *Red Desert* itself, become very similar, in a way.

Moreover, the apocalyptic scenarios of *Red Desert* or Passaic may not even look like "The End." At the end of *The Desert*, Van Dyke asked: "Is then this great expand of sand and rock the beginning of the end?"¹⁸² Conversely, could it be that for Antonioni and Smithson the desert is a way of positing the idea of "The End" as, if not an entirely new beginning, then – at least – a moment of rupture which is also a moment of *continuation*? Whilst not quite the fresh start, the radical renewal, the "Zero Point" that Mekas's enthusiastic review attributed to *Zabriskie Point*, Smithson's and Antonioni's desert may at least indicate prolongation, or persistence. The space of the desert, that is, may suggest the possibility of continuation *after* the shocks of the twentieth century, and after the breaking down of time "into many times."¹⁸³ An entropic space in which ends and beginnings are confused and thus made *indifferent* and equivalent, the desert may be seen to function as a levelling and

he had to stand through the screening because the seats were sold out. He not only personally liked the film, as we have seen, but he "defended" it twice in his "Movie Journal." See: Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 371-373 (entry for 12 February in addition to the aforementioned one for 19 February 1970).

¹⁸¹ On this see, among others: Chatman, *Antonioni: or, The Surface of the World*; Dalle Vacche, "Michelangelo Antonioni's Red Desert. Painting as Ventriloquism and Colour as Movement," in *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (London: Athlone Press, 1996); Sam Rohdie, *Antonioni* (London: BFI, 1990).

¹⁸² Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 231.

¹⁸³ Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," 11.

“democratizing” concept *vis à vis* time, or times – just like the cinema that the desert embodies and embeds within itself. And as by the cinema as such, time is at once expanded and relativized by (to return to Smithson’s expression) the “cinema-ized” space of the desert. Yet, as human time is dwarfed by geology and its “centrality” is eroded by entropy, this de-hierachization and levelling, though a radical challenge to its position, are not necessarily a way of positing its “end,” or the end of the subject as the “seat” of time. Rather, in a project that is at once “modern” and “postmodern,” they may constitute a way of re-thinking subjectivity and temporality, and of inviting the subject to re-think itself in its relation to time.

Conclusion

In 2001, Rodney Graham made *Softcore: More Solo Music for the Sex Scene, Zabriskie Point*. As the title suggests, the work is inspired by Antonioni's film and, more precisely, by the extended love-in sequence in *Death Valley*. Here, Daria and Mark, having started to make love in the sand and playfully cover themselves with dust, are soon "joined" by an ever multiplying number of people likewise engaged. At the time of *Zabriskie Point*'s original release, in 1970, this scene proved no less explosive than the actual explosion in the concluding sequence, contributing to make the film, as Graham puts it (and as noted above), "the bomb that almost sunk Michelangelo Antonioni's film career."¹ Just as the finale of destruction generated furore for its supposed indictment of American consumerism, the explosiveness of the "sex scene" derived from its apparent celebration of the "counterculture" and the hippie generation, rather than its – albeit daring – shots of full nudity.² For *Softcore*, Graham took seven minutes of this sequence and copied the same fragment for as many times as are needed (about fifteen) to reproduce the exact overall duration of Antonioni's film, 108 minutes. Reversed from left to right, this was then projected on a screen placed in the gallery, behind which Graham sat (able to see the images the "right" way around) improvising music on his guitar. And while the accompaniment was his own, this set up intentionally parroted that followed by Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, whose music provided the soundtrack in Antonioni's original. For, as Graham

¹ Rodney Graham, "Softcore: More Solo Guitar Music for the Sex Scene, Zabriskie Point," artist's notes for live performance on 8 March 2001, part of *Rodney Graham*, solo exhibition, 9 March to 7 April 2001, at Galerie Micheline Zzwajcer, Belgium. Website: http://www.gms.be/graham_exhibition_2001.html, accessed 3 March 2004.

² For contemporary reviews see, among others, the anthology collected in Michelangelo Antonioni, *Zabriskie Point* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1970).

himself recounts, Garcia, invited to provide a score for the scene, “noodled on the guitar for several hours, while repeatedly viewing a looped version of [the] footage” as an inspirational prompt.³ A remastered version of the music with the looped sequence was then released on a limited-edition digital video, and *Softcore*, initially a live performance, now also exists and circulates in this form.

There are many ways in which Graham’s appropriation of *Zabriskie Point* exemplifies the relation between Antonioni and experimental cinema considered in this thesis. A complex instance of that “borrowing” and “repurposing” between works in different media, and media as such, that Bolter and Grusin term “remediation,” *Softcore* brings *Zabriskie Point* into the present.⁴ Antonioni’s biggest flop – and, by extension, the now obsolescent analogue technology with which it was made – are “resuscitated,” so to speak, with digital technology. Furthermore, *Zabriskie Point* is thus recuperated for a mode of reception (in the art gallery) different from the one to which it was originally destined.⁵ If this translation points to the appeal Antonioni still holds for the contemporary visual arts, then it also encapsulates the affinities his cinema shared from the start with a cinematic culture alternative to that of the “feature” film as commonly understood. Drawing on – as well as, indeed, literally made of – the language and material of both Antonioni’s and experimental cinema, *Softcore* stands as a sort of embodiment of the intertwining between the two practices my argument addresses. Its synthesis of the two for the contemporary art gallery, in turn, points to how the cross-pollination between arts and media that flourished in the 1960s is both embedded in and generative of today’s visual culture.

³ Graham, “*Softcore*.”

⁴ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 45. For more on “remediation,” see Chapter 2 above.

⁵ In fact, Graham’s recuperation of *Zabriskie Point* is representative of a more widespread “renaissance” *Zabriskie Point* has recently begun to enjoy with critics and artists alike. Amongst others, it is the subject of a forthcoming essay by Matthew Gandy, “The Cinematic Void: The Representation

But even more crucially, Graham's layered remediation of *Zabriskie Point* throws into focus the question of time and time's mediation via the cinematic that is central to my thesis. For, even *as* it remediates analogue cinema into digital cinema (and the dark movie-house auditorium into the dimly-lit white cube), *Softcore* confirms the crucial role of cinema as a medium for "apprehending" time – a medium, that is, for articulating *and* thinking time – highlighted throughout the preceding chapters. Indeed, it is in great part by drawing attention to how cinema not only transforms but is also transformed by other media and technologies that *Softcore* crystallizes the centrality of the cinematic in the apprehension of time. Though centred on the remediation of cinema itself, Graham's piece also refers us back to how other media – such as photography and sound recording, my foci in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively – are remediated *by* or *within* cinema, transforming both in the process. In this respect, the metamorphosis of cinema that *Softcore* plays out recalls Hollis Frampton's comments on the radical plasticity of cinema – and his conviction that it is precisely this radical plasticity which cinema shares with time, thus making cinema a privileged medium of time.⁶

On the one hand then, Graham's remediation of cinema already embodies and displays time in and of itself. Just like the "cine-repetitions," as Raymond Bellour once called them, that make up cinema as a technology, an illusion and a culture, this too is a *kind* of repetition whose constitutive elements of "difference" are the very markers of time.⁷ (Enticingly here, what makes and marks the difference with Antonioni's original – and thus designates the passing of time – is not only Graham's

of Desert Space in Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*," in Martin Lefebvre, ed., *The Cinematic Landscape* (London: Routledge, in press); and it inspired Angela Bulloch's art installation *Z-Point* (2001).

⁶ See: Simon Field, "Interview with Hollis Frampton," *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), 44-77, esp. 73, and above, Introduction.

⁷ Raymond Bellour, "Cine-Repetitions," trans. Kari Hanet, *Screen* 20 (Summer 1979), 65-72, and above, Chapter 4.

copying of the “sex scene” in a different and “new” medium for a different and “new” context, but also the fact that he obstinately repeats it again and again.) On the other hand, with repetition – and indeed, more precisely, the various kinds of repetition which make up his remediation of *Zabriskie Point* – Graham also recapitulates many of the ways in which both Antonioni and experimental cinema articulated and “thought” time through the cinematic.

Thus, Graham’s relentless representation of the same clip of *Zabriskie Point* bears in important respects on the question of the “cut” considered in Chapter 1. For Graham’s strategy here is also one of cutting: both “out” of *Zabriskie Point* and “into” *Softcore*, each echoing the ways in which in the course of the 1960s the cut came to be seen as a “positive” operation – if not, indeed, itself a segment or a thing. The cut acquired visibility within the fabric of the film: an elision or interruption of time remaining as a positive imprint on the screen and becoming, even, a durational segment in its own right. We have seen how this relates to questions of time and subjectivity – in particular, their perceived inextricability and mutual discontinuity. To filmmakers in many respects as diverse as Frampton, Antonioni and Alain Resnais, the cut was precisely that which could articulate this inextricability and this discontinuity and, besides, at some level make present and possibly visible the “ruptures” or “negatives” of time as well. But, as I argue throughout the thesis, cinema *makes* time as much as it represents it. Thus, while cinema’s cuts could – and, as shown, were – seen to reproduce a model of the mind as temporally discontinuous, they also, in fact, produced a model for it. Similarly, more than just a means to incarnate the cut *in* time as such – the moment when time is “suspended,” given over to its negative “other,” as in the fantasy scene in *Red Desert* (1964) – cinema actively figures and configures it. Much of this is self-consciously at stake in Graham’s work,

Softcore in particular. For here it is precisely not only a cut *of* time (a segment) but a cut *in* time that gets repeated again and again: Daria and Mark's drug-induced fantasy/mirage in the desert, certainly one of the most exquisitely cinematic moments in Antonioni's film.

Paradoxically, however, its repetition for over fifteen times (15.4 to be precise), so as to make *Softcore* match *Zabriskie Point*'s length to the minute, also at some level dilutes – if not, indeed, temporally dilates – its cinematic qualities. And in so much as, through reiteration, *Softcore* renders *Zabriskie Point*'s notorious sex scene “uncinematic,” it recalls the attributes of stillness and slowness, and the related question of boredom, discussed in Chapter 2. For the Belgian kinetic artist Pol Bury, slowness consisted of an oscillation between “the immobile and mobility” by which time is “dilated,” made long.⁸ In Chapter 2, I considered how it is precisely this paradoxical binary of stillness and movement – of stillness *in* movement – that the remediation of photography within cinema effects. The remediation of the still within the moving image that, as we saw, is characteristic of the cinema of the 1960s and 1970s in manifold ways, changes both, producing a blend of photographic *and* unphotographic, cinematic *and* uncinematic. And whilst this is indicative of the period's intensive inquiry into the origin, nature and structure of cinema itself, it is also, I argued, linked to the contemporary pursuit of boredom and its thematization as, specifically, a problem of time. For the oxymoron of the still in the film (or even, as in Andy Warhol's “Screen Tests,” of a “still” film) at once echoes and shapes boredom, where time is apparently caught in a similar tension of stasis and motion, experienced as something that fails to pass, passing nevertheless. By contrast with the moving stillness of photography in cinema, in *Softcore* it is the movement of cinema as such

⁸ Pol Bury, “Time Dilated” [1964], in Dore Ashton, *Pol Bury* (Paris: Maeght Editeur, 1970), 107.

that is somewhat stationary: endlessly, it just seems to retrace its own steps. And this “static” quality of *Softcore*’s moving imagery is as if redoubled by the monotonous drone Graham – parroting Garcia – produced for it.

Consideration of the music in both *Softcore* and *Zabriskie Point* leads us on to sound, the topic of Chapter 3. Sounds, durational by definition, *take* time. If, in this respect, they function as a demonstration of time and its passing, then they also further temporalize the image when joined to it. Thus, Antonioni’s attention to “soundscape” – attention undoubtedly encouraged by the development of magnetic tape technology in the course of the 1950s and 1960s – contributes to embed and map time into the visual. This is so even if, or in fact precisely because, the sounds he focuses on are those of ordinariness and everydayness, when time itself seems “dead,” or a drag. The extent to which sound further embeds and adds layers of time to the image is thrown into relief by the *mise-en-abyme* (indeed, the “remediation”) of sound recording technology itself in film. For, here, chronologically disjointed moments are made to co-exist “audio-visually.” The hiatus between the instance of recording and its playback is poignantly on display: at once a temporal depth and a gap in time that, in a slightly different context, Gilles Deleuze has defined as a “cut” inside, as opposed to outside, of the cinematic image.⁹ Meanwhile, this “cut” between aural and visual so self-reflexively flaunted in a film such as *The Passenger* (1975) is both evoked and, in a way, “erased” in *Softcore*. Called into play by the delayed addition of a “new” soundtrack to “old” footage, the extent to which Graham’s “noodling” resembles Garcia’s own also brings the “new” music back to the “old.”

The repetitiousness of Graham’s “noodling” – also a sort of “loop” back into the original work – shows us how *Softcore* rekindles the patterns of repetition and

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time Image* [1985], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), esp. 241-261.

reduplication already at the heart of *Zabriskie Point*'s sex scene itself. For Graham's obsessive looping emphasizes the way in which repetition is at once displayed and played with in the original, where – to Garcia's droning music – Daria and Mark are redoubled by a myriad other couples replicating their already repetitive actions. And where this "distils" and recalls the repetitions structuring Antonioni's cinema more widely, it also points to how these repetitions as such, in turn, relate to the avant-garde of the time and its enquiries into the nature of the cinematic. Thus, in Chapter 4, we have seen how the scene of the final explosion, for instance, quotes the device of the "loop" signature of many experimental films in the period. In particular, I have discussed how for both Antonioni and experimental filmmakers the intrinsic reproducibility and repeatability of the cinematic became a tool for exploring time and its intrinsic unrepeatability. Cinema, that is, functioned as something that demonstrated temporal accumulation, irreversibility and entropy precisely *via* repetition, circularity and looping. And it is in this respect that the desert, not only for artists such as Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, but also for Antonioni himself, came to stand as an analogue of cinema – and, indeed, as intrinsically cinematic: a space for "seeing" and "thinking" time. In fact, *Softcore*'s focus *on* the desert and, furthermore, its repetition and "looping" *of* the desert, also help to crystallize this latter's deep affinity with the cinema. Its attributes of repetition and difference, circularity and linearity, immobility and mobility, reflection and mirage are in many respects homologous with those of cinema. And this homology, in turn, points to how cinema has percolated into modes of perceiving and thinking – modes of perceiving and thinking time in particular.

Filmography

Feature films, shorts and documentaries

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Gente del Po* (*The People of the Po River*, Italy, 1942-43/1947).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Nettezza Urbana* (*N.U.*, Italy, 1948).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *L'amorosa menzogna* (*Loving Lie*, Italy, 1949).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Cronaca di un amore* (*Story of a Love Affair/Chronicle of a Love*, Italy, 1950).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Le amiche* (*The Girlfriends*, Italy, 1955).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Il grido* (*The Cry*, Italy/USA, 1957).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *L'avventura* (Italy/France, 1960).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *La notte* (Italy/France, 1961).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *L'eclisse* (Italy/France, 1962).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*, Italy/France, 1964).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Blow-up* (UK/Italy, 1966).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *Zabriskie Point* (USA, 1970).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *The Passenger* (*Professione: Reporter*, USA, 1975).

Antonioni, Michelangelo, *The Mystery of Oberwald* (Italy/West Germany, 1981, videotape film for television broadcast).

Bergman, Ingmar, *Persona* (Sweden, 1966).

Coppola, Francis Ford, *The Conversation* (USA, 1974).

Duras, Marguerite, *India Song* (France, 1975).

Egoyan, Atom, *Krapp's Last Tape* (Ireland, 2000, for television broadcast).

Fellini, Federico, *La dolce vita* (Italy/France, 1960).

Fellini, Federico, *Lo sceicco bianco* (*The White Sheik*, Italy, 1952).

Hill, George Roy, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (USA, 1969).

Hitchcock, Alfred, *The Birds* (USA, 1963).

Kubrick, Stanley, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (UK/USA, 1968).

Lai, Sandro, *Michelangelo Antonioni: lo sguardo che ha cambiato il cinema*
(*Michelangelo Antonioni: The Eye that Changed Cinema*, Italy, 2001).

Labarthe, S. André, *La Dernière Séquence de Profession Reporter* (*The Last Sequence of The Passenger*, France, 1974).

Lumière, Louis, *L'Arroseur arrosé* (France, 1895, silent).

Malick, Terrence, *Badlands* (USA, 1973).

Resnais, Alain, *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, France, 1955).

Resnais, Alain, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, France, 1961).

Pakula Alan, *The Parallax View* (USA, 1974).

Powell, Michael *Peeping Tom* (UK, 1960).

Tovoli, Luciano, *Antonioni visto da Antonioni* (Italy, 1978).

Vertov, Dziga, *Man with a Movie Camera* (Soviet Union, 1929, silent).

Experimental Films and Videos:

Beydler, Gary, *Pasadena Freeway Stills* (USA, 1974, 16 mm, colour, silent, 6 mins).

Conrad, Tony, *The Flicker* (USA, 1965, 16mm, b&w, sound on tape, 30 mins).

Fisher, Morgan, *Production Stills* (USA, 1970, 16mm, b&w, sound, 11 mins).

Fisher, Morgan, *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)* (USA, 1968, 16mm, colour, sound, 15 mins).

Frampton, Hollis, *Process Red* (USA, 1966, 16mm, colour, silent, 3 ½ mins).

Frampton, Hollis, *Heterodyne* (USA, 1967, 16mm, colour, silent, 7 mins).

Frampton, Hollis, *Maxwell's Demon* (USA, 1968, 16 mm, colour, sound, 4 mins).

Frampton, Hollis, *Zorns Lemma* (USA, 1970, 16 mm, colour, sound, 60 mins).

Frampton, Hollis, *nostalgia* (USA, 1971, 16 mm, b&w, sound, 36 mins).

Higgins, Dick, *Invocation of Canyons and Boulders for Stan Brakhage* (USA, 1963, 16 mm, colour, sound, 1 min).

Holt, Nancy, *Pine Barrens* (USA, 1975, 16 mm, colour, sound, 31 mins).

Holt, Nancy, *Sun Tunnels* (USA, 1978, 16 mm, colour, sound, 26 1/2 mins).

Jacobs, Ken, *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (USA, 1969, 16 mm, b&w and colour, silent, 115 mins).

Landow, George (now known as Owen Land) *Film in Which There Appear, Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, Etc.* (USA, 1965/66, 16 mm, colour, silent, 5 mins).

Landow, George (now known as Owen Land) *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (USA, 1970, 16 mm, colour, sound, 5 mins).

Landow, George (now known as George Lando), *Bardo Follies or Diploteratology* (USA, 1967, 16 mm, colour, silent, 20 mins). [Versions of different length exist]

Le Grice, Malcolm, *Little Dog for Roger* (UK, 1967, 16 mm, b&w, sound, 13 mins).

Le Grice, Malcolm, *Berlin Horse* (UK, 1970, 16 mm, colour, sound, 8 mins, single or double screen).

Le Grice, Malcolm, *After Lumière* (UK, 1974, 16 mm, colour, sound, 16 mins).

Marker, Chris, *La Jetée* (France, 1962, 16 mm, b&w, sound, 29 mins).

Nauman, Bruce, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (USA, 1967, 16 mm, b&w, silent, 10 mins).

Nauman, Bruce, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio* (USA, 1967/68, 16 mm, b&w, sound, 10 mins).

Nauman, Bruce, *Pulling Mouth* (USA, 1969, 16 mm, b&w, silent, 8 mins).

Ono, Yoko, *Eye Blink* (USA, 1966, in *Fluxfilm Program* [1966/70], 16 mm, colour and b&w, silent, 40 mins).

Paik, Nam June, *Zen for Film* (USA, 1964, 16 mm, approx 23 1/2 mins of film leader).

Rainer, Yvonne, *Lives of Performers* (USA, 1972, 16 mm, b&w, sound, 90 mins).

Rosler, Martha *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (USA, 1975, video, 6 mins).

Sharits, Paul, *Ray Gun Virus* (USA, 1966, 16 mm, colour, sound, 14 mins).

Sharits, Paul, *Shutter Interface* (USA, 1975, 16 mm, colour, sound, 23 1/2 mins, double screen).

Smithson, Robert, *Spiral Jetty* (USA, 1970, 16 mm, colour, sound, 34 1/2 mins).

Snow, Michael, *Wavelength* (Canada, 1967, 16 mm, colour, sound, 45 mins).

Snow, Michael, *Back and Forth* (Canada, 1969, 16 mm, colour, sound, 52 mins).

Snow Michael, *One Second in Montreal* (Canada, 1969, 16 mm, b&w, silent, 18fps, 25 mins).

Warhol, Andy, *Sleep* (USA, 1963, 16 mm, b&w, silent, 321 mins, 16fps).

Warhol, Andy, *Empire* (USA, 1964, 16 mm, b&w, silent, 485 mins).

Warhol, Andy, *13 Most Beautiful Boys* (USA, 1964, 16 mm, b&w, silent, approx. 40 mins, 18fps).

Warhol, Andy, *13 Most Beautiful Women* (USA, 1964, 16 mm, b&w, silent, approx. 40 mins, 18fps).

Wieland, Joyce and Frampton, Hollis, *A and B in Ontario* (Canada, 1967/84, 16mm, b&w, sound, 16 mins).

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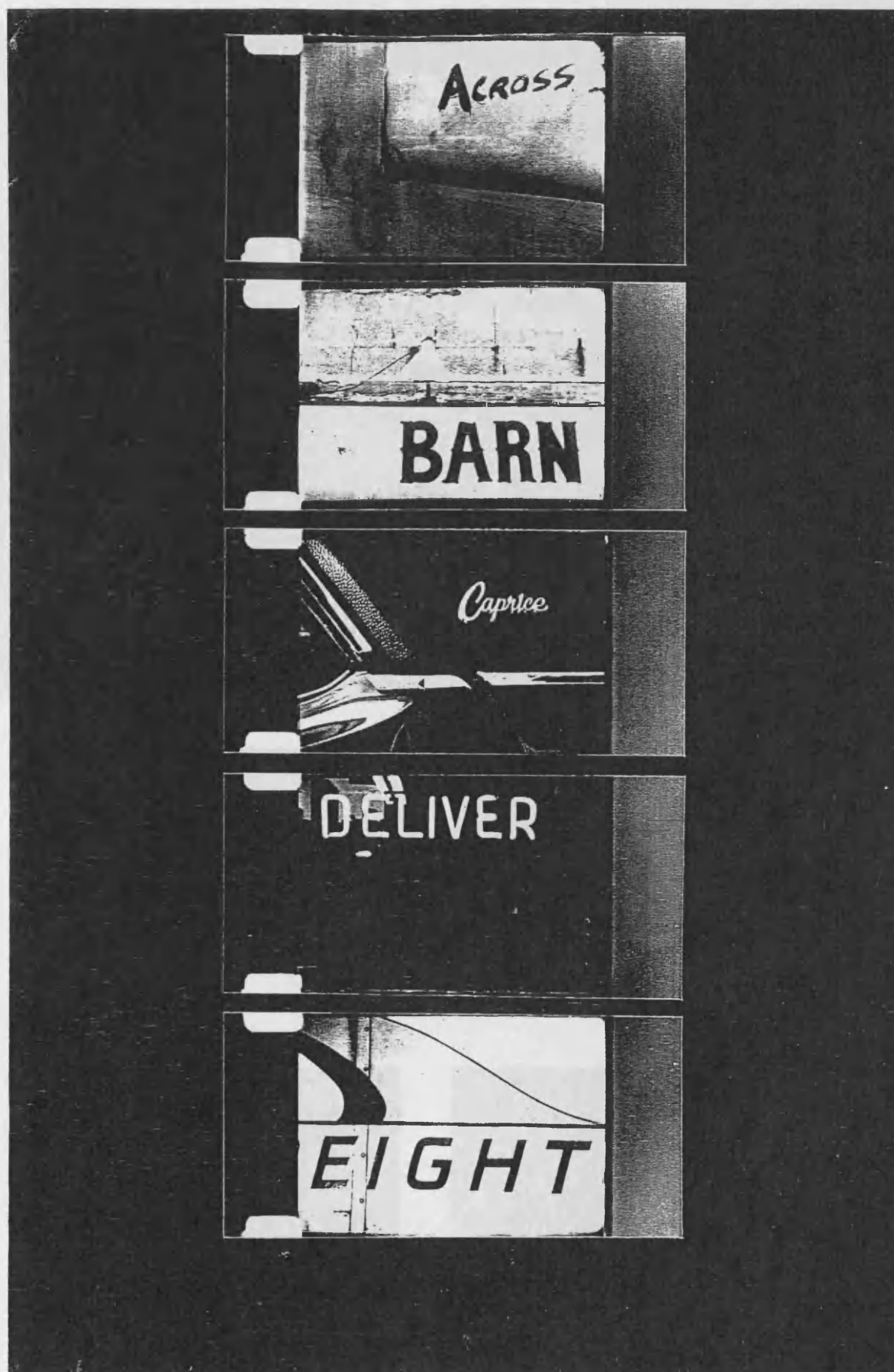
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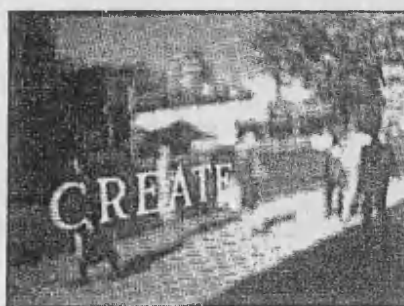
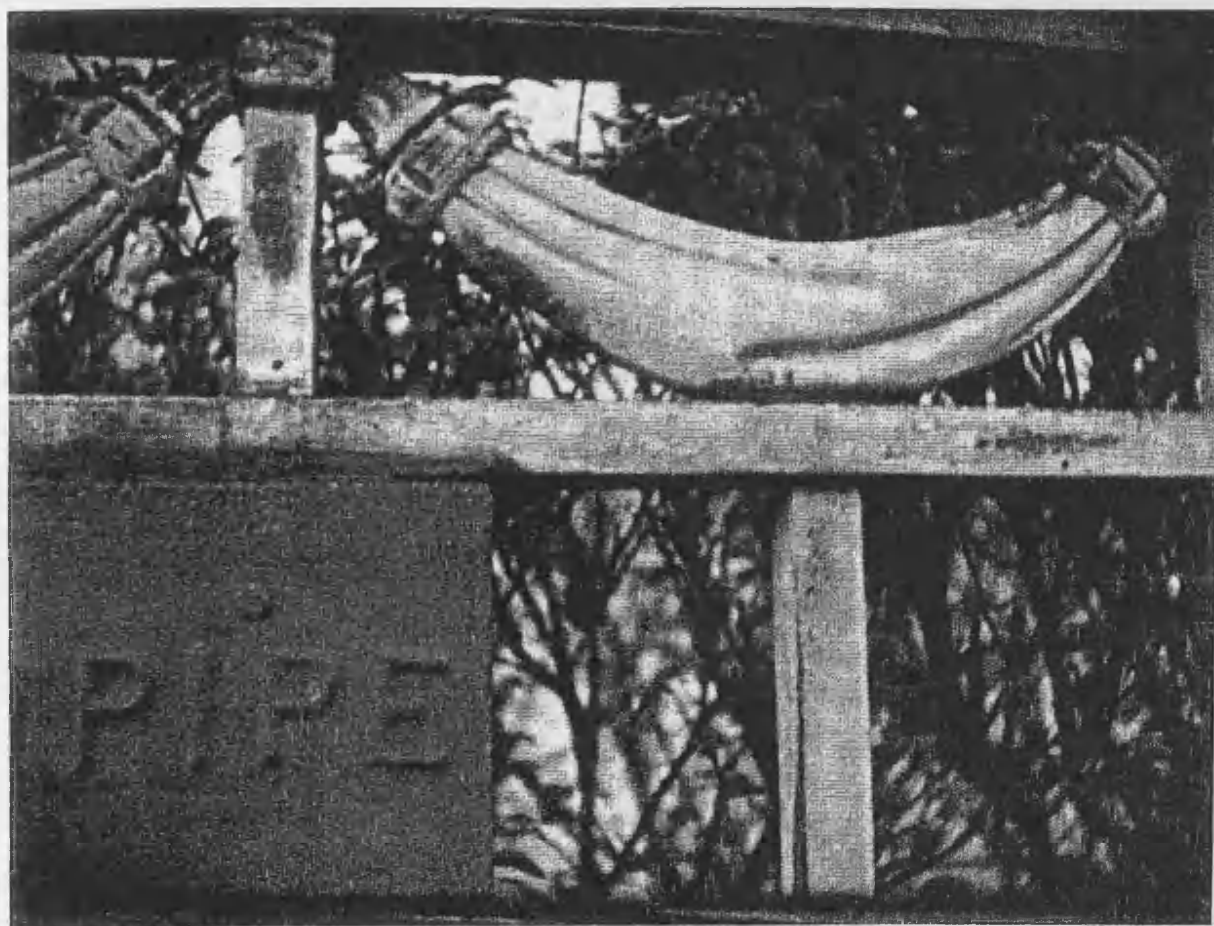
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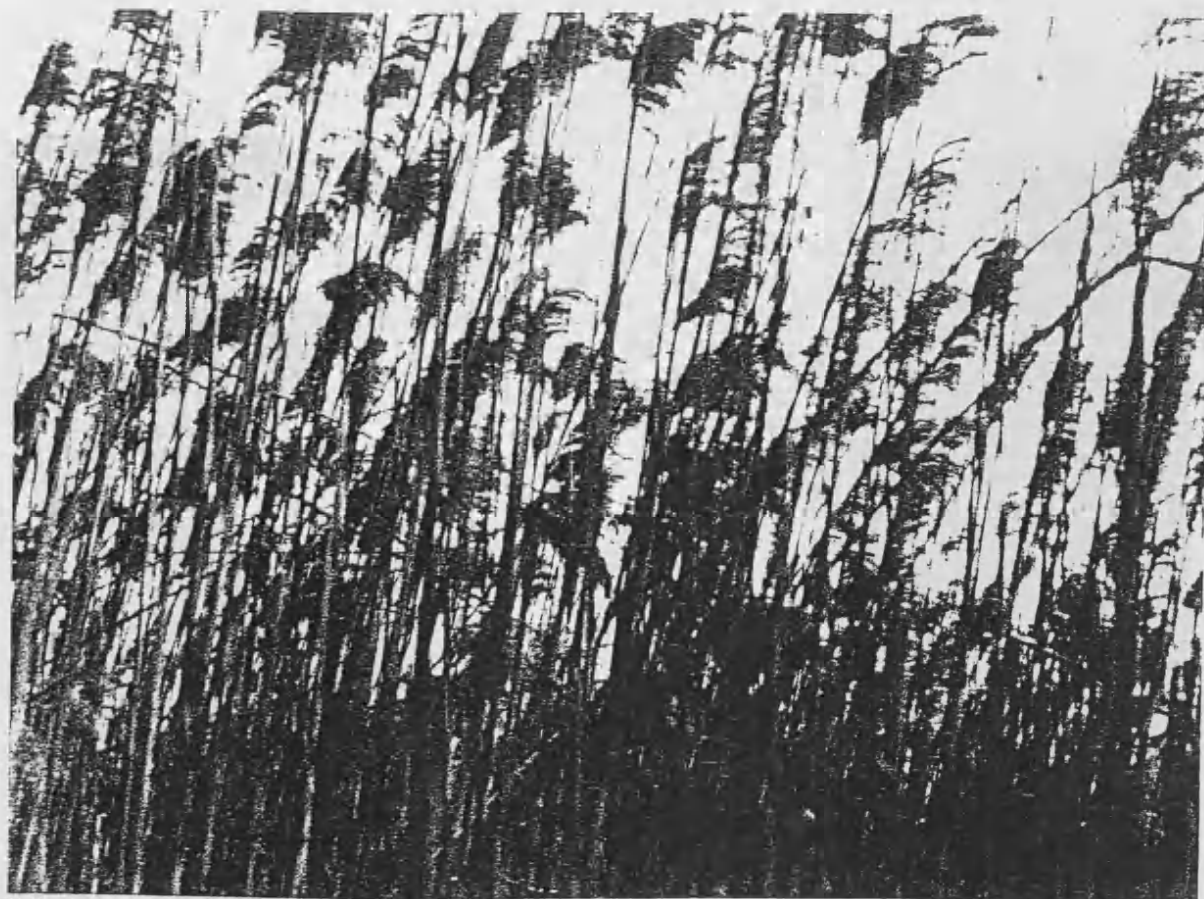
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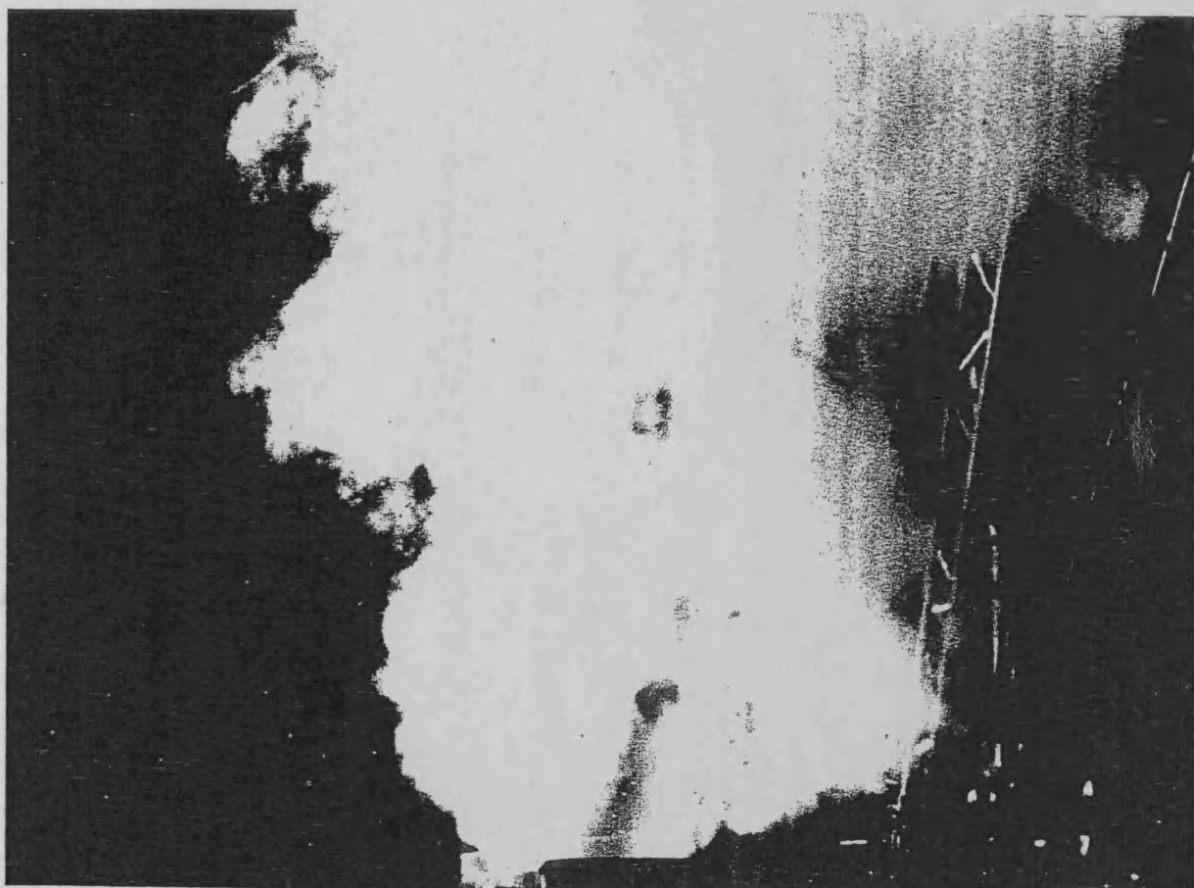
III.1: Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 1970. Source: British Film Institute, London.



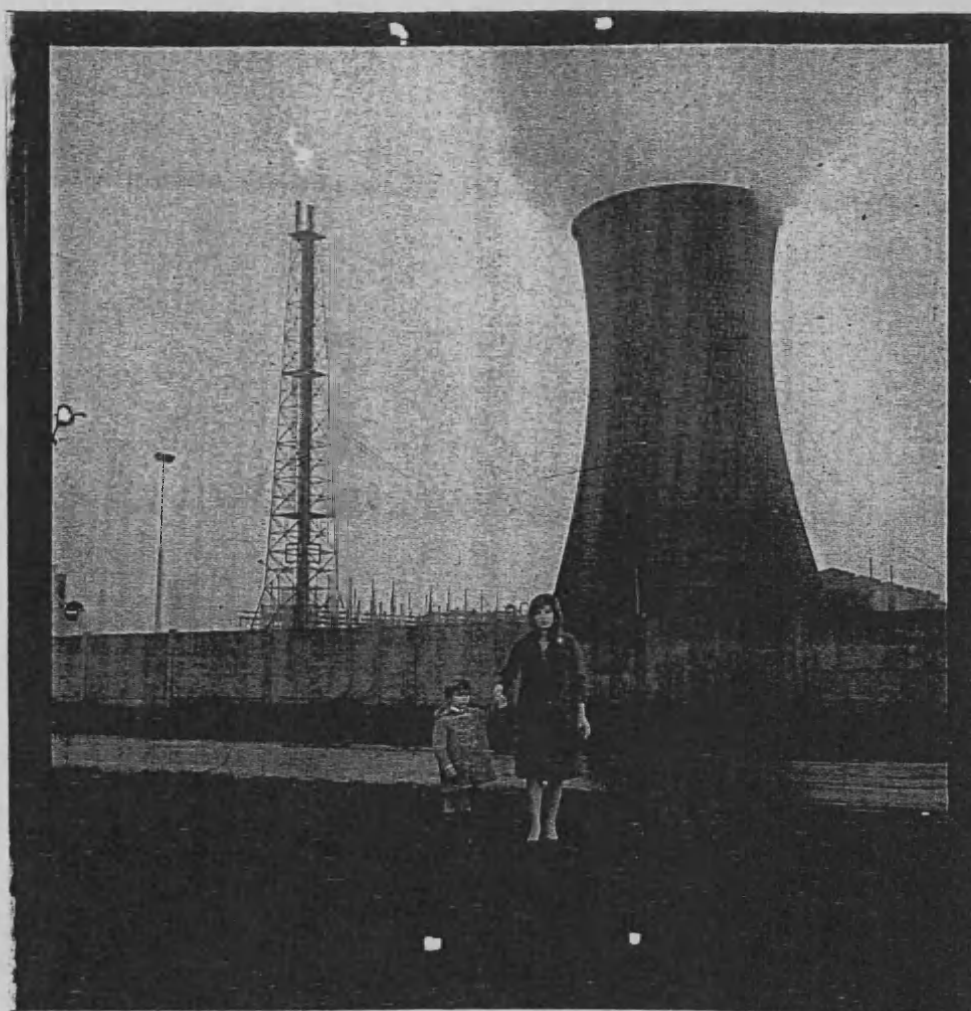
III. 2: Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 1970. Source: *Artforum* 10: Special Film Issue (September 1971).



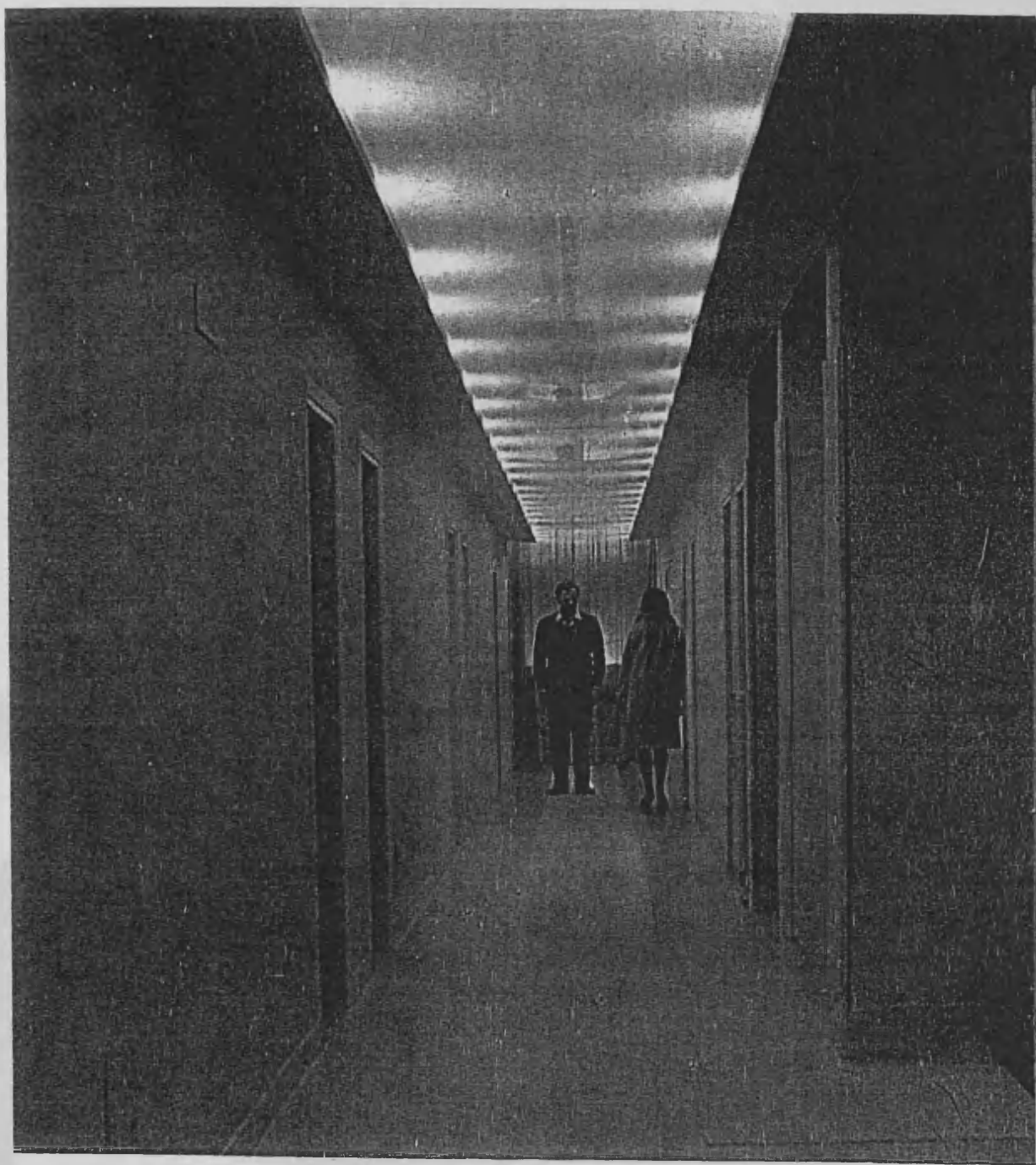
III.3: Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 1970. Source: *Artforum* 10: Special Film Issue (September 1971).



III.4: Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 1970. Source: *Artforum* 10: Special Film Issue (September 1971).



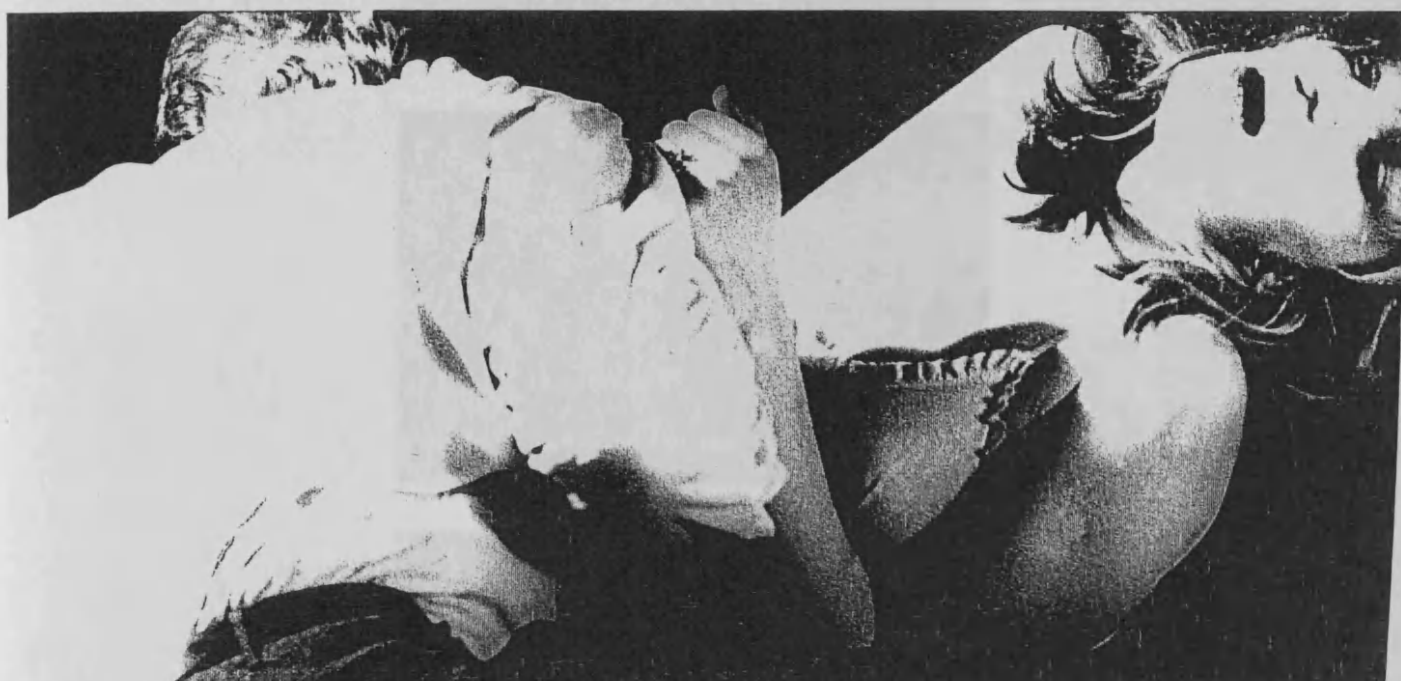
III.5: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Red Desert*, 1964. Source: British Film Institute, London.



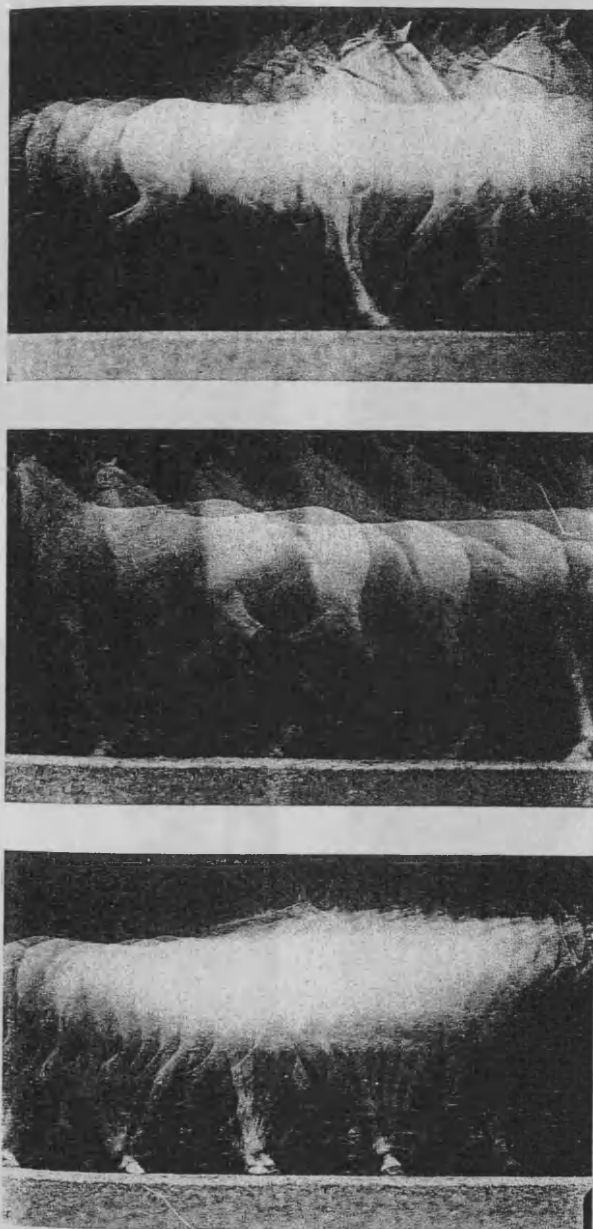
III.6: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Red Desert*, 1964. Source: British Film Institute, London.



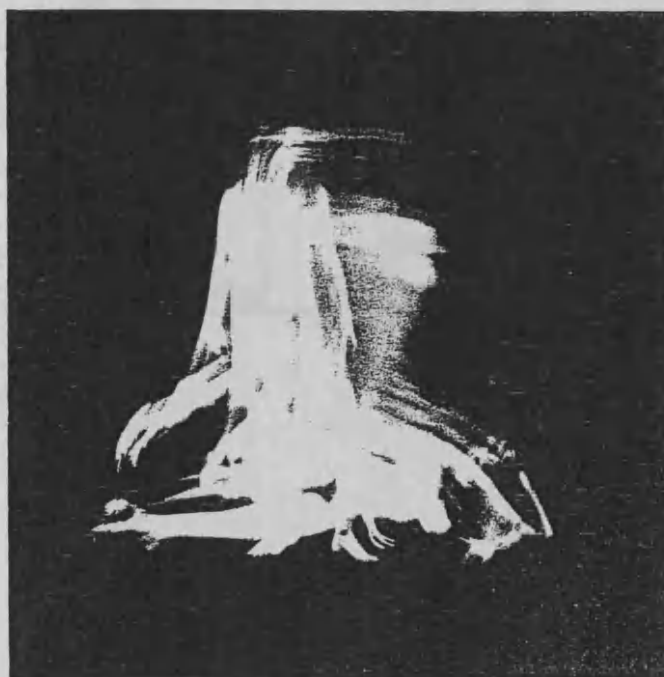
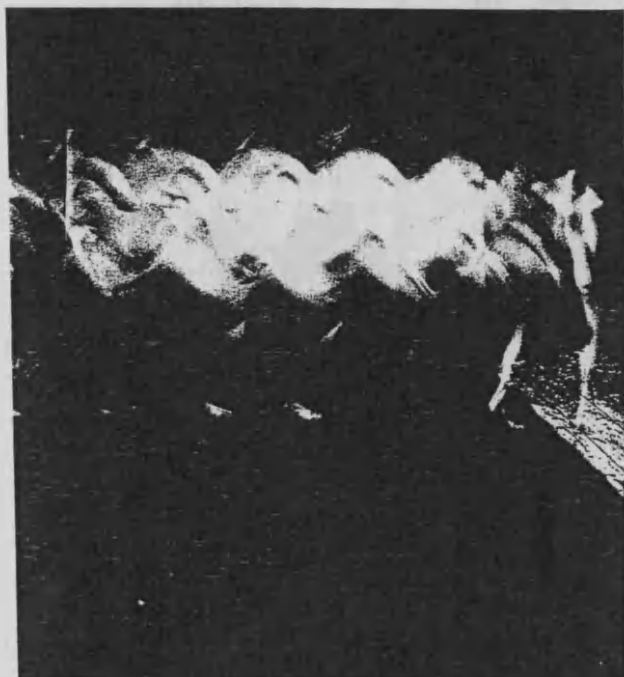
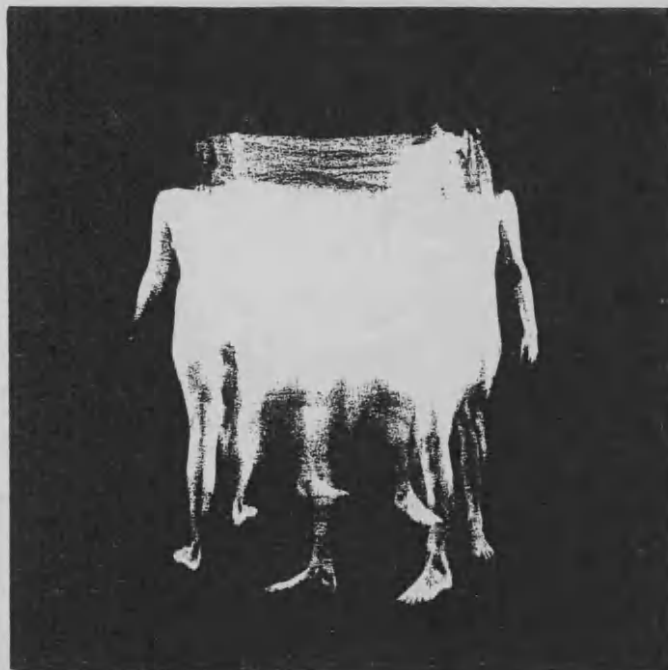
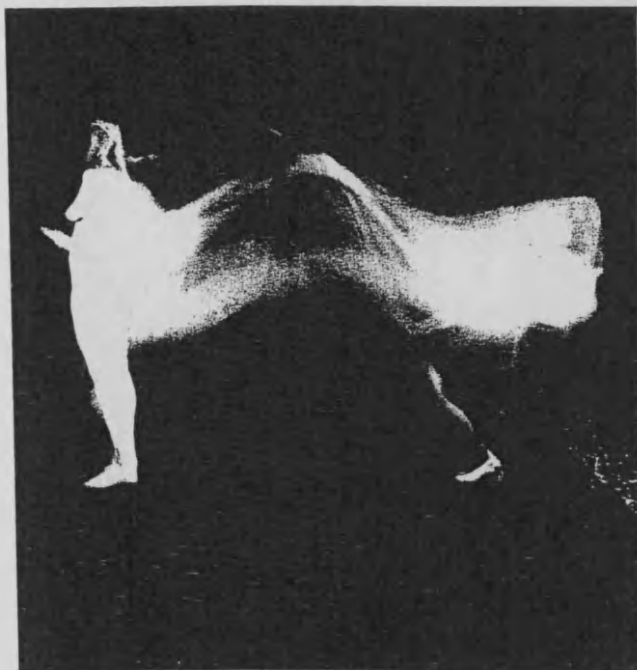
III. 7: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Red Desert*, 1964. Source: British Film Institute, London.



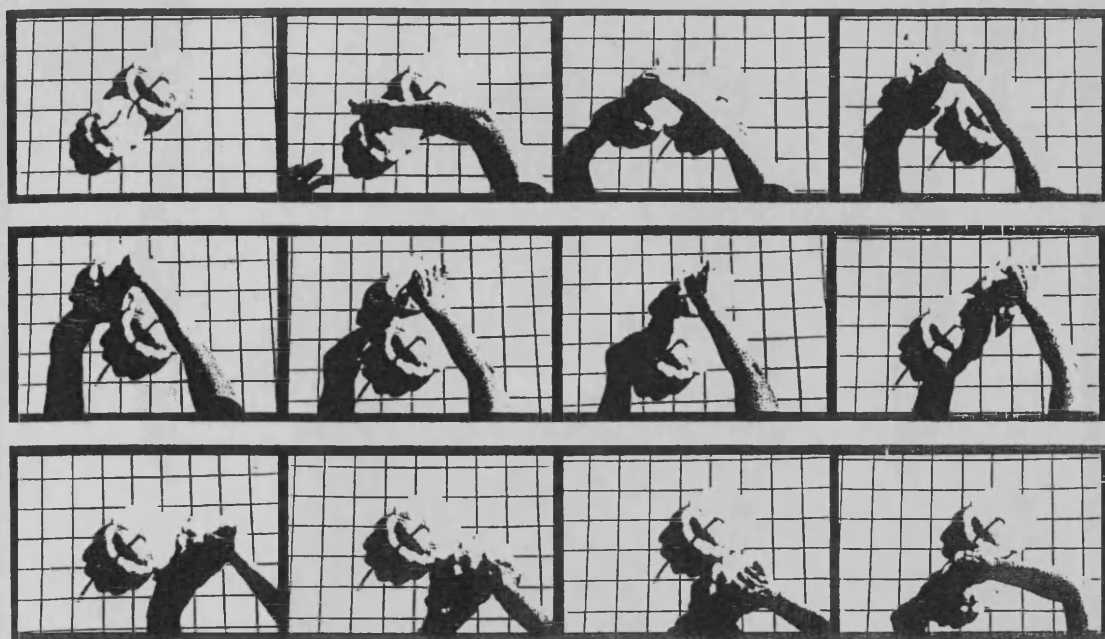
III.8: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Red Desert*, 1964. Source: British Film Institute, London.



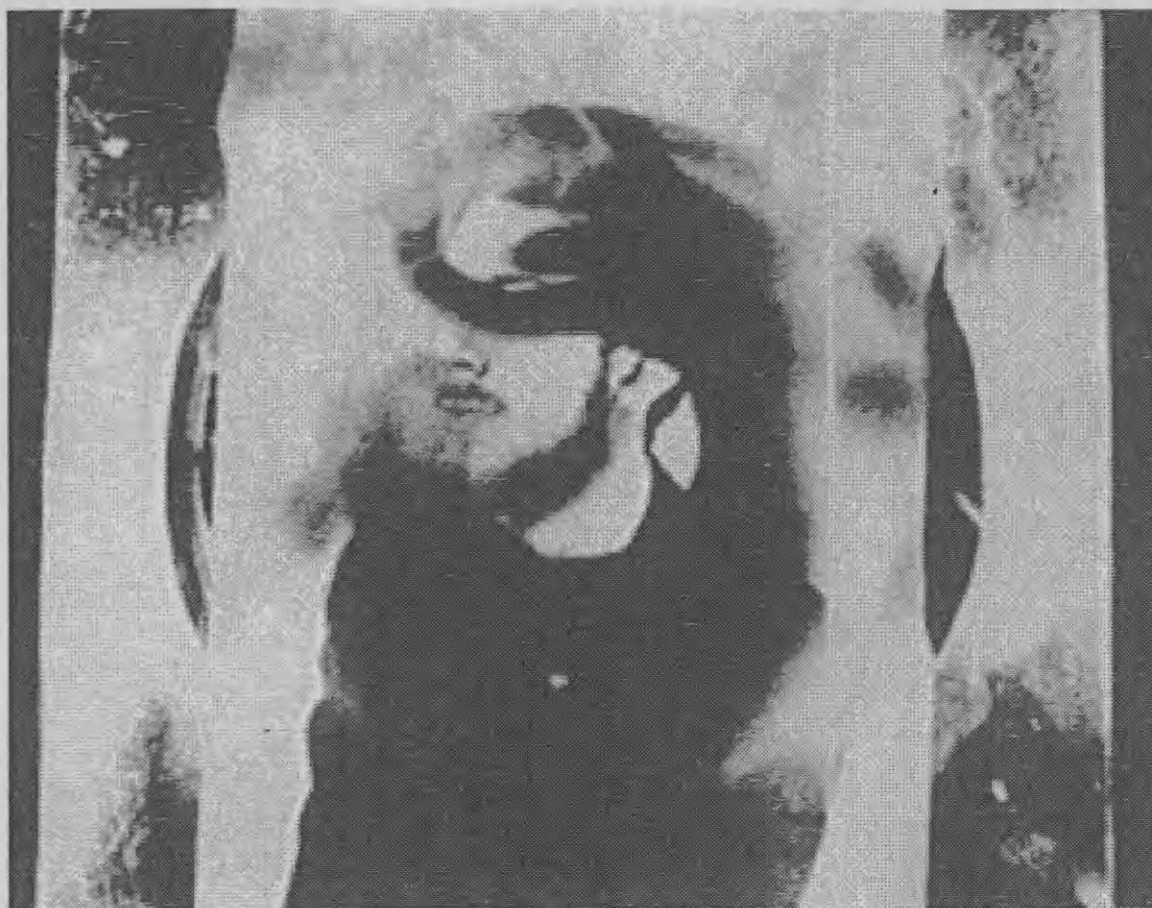
III.9: Etienne-Jules Marey, *Movements of a White Horse*, 1885-1886. Source: Collège de France.



Ill. 10: Hollis Frampton, from the photographic series *A Visitation from Insomnia*, 1970-1973; black and white photographs, each 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{8}$. Source: Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane, eds., *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/Recreations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984.



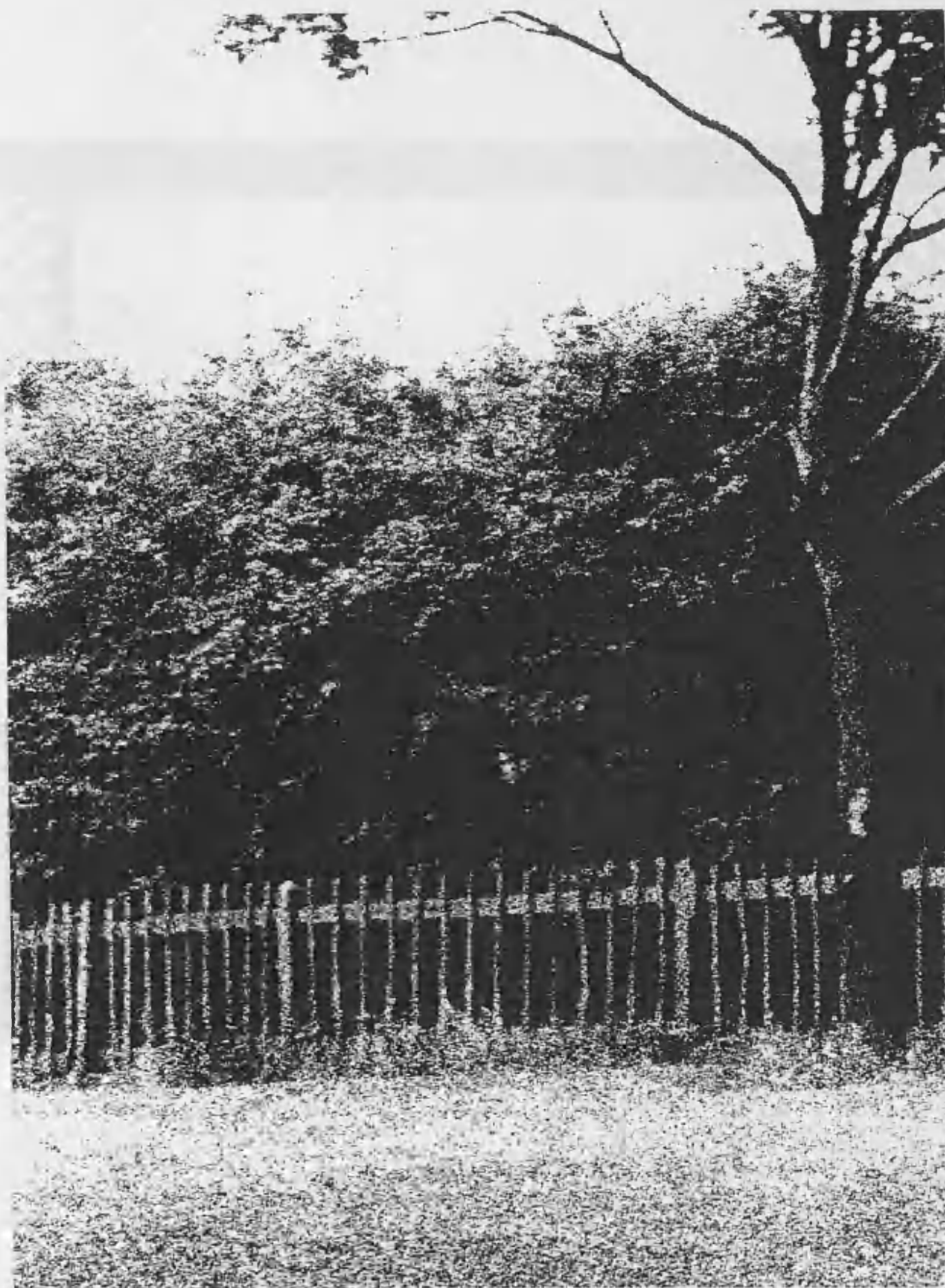
III. 11: Hollis Frampton, "Scallop Squash Revolving" [var. "Patty Pan"], from *Sixteen Studies from Vegetable Locomotion*, 1975; black and white photograph, 11 x 14. Source: Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane, eds., *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/Recreations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984.



III. 12: Hollis Frampton, *nostalgia*, 1971 (Frampton's self-portrait burning).



III. 13: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-up*, 1966. Source: British Film Institute.



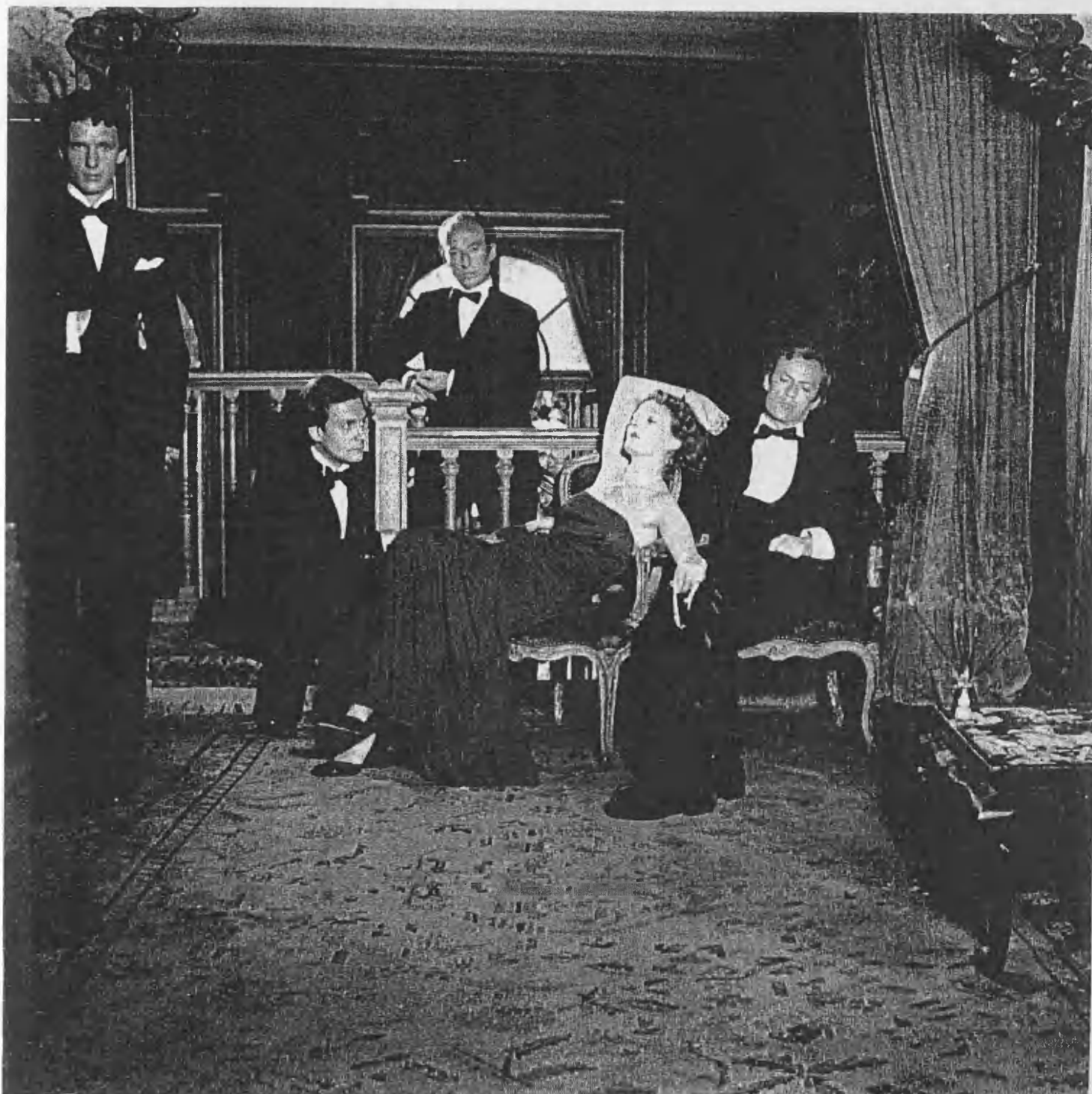
III. 14: Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-up*, 1966. Source: British Film Institute.



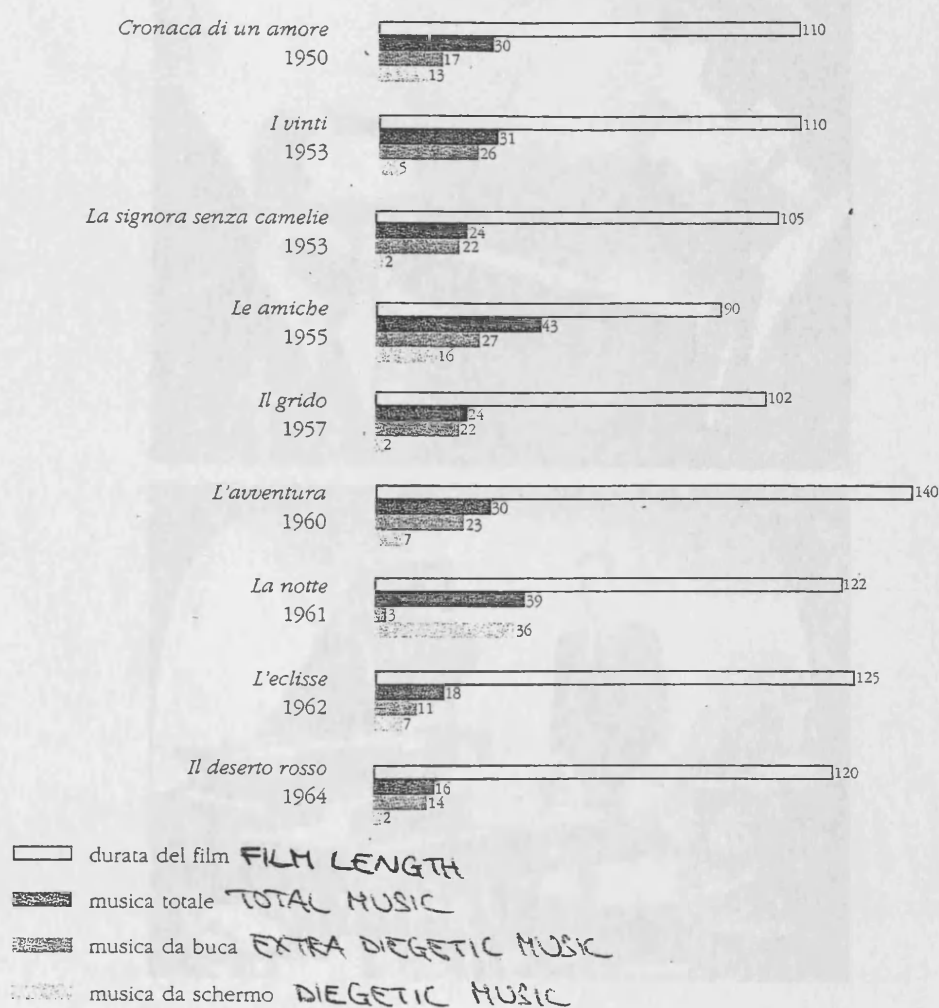
III. 15: Michelangelo Antonioni, *L'eclisse*, 1962. Source: British Film Institute.



Ill. 16: Marguerite Duras, *India Song*, 1975. Source: British Film Institute.



III. 17: Marguerite Duras, *India Song*, 1975. Source: British Film Institute.



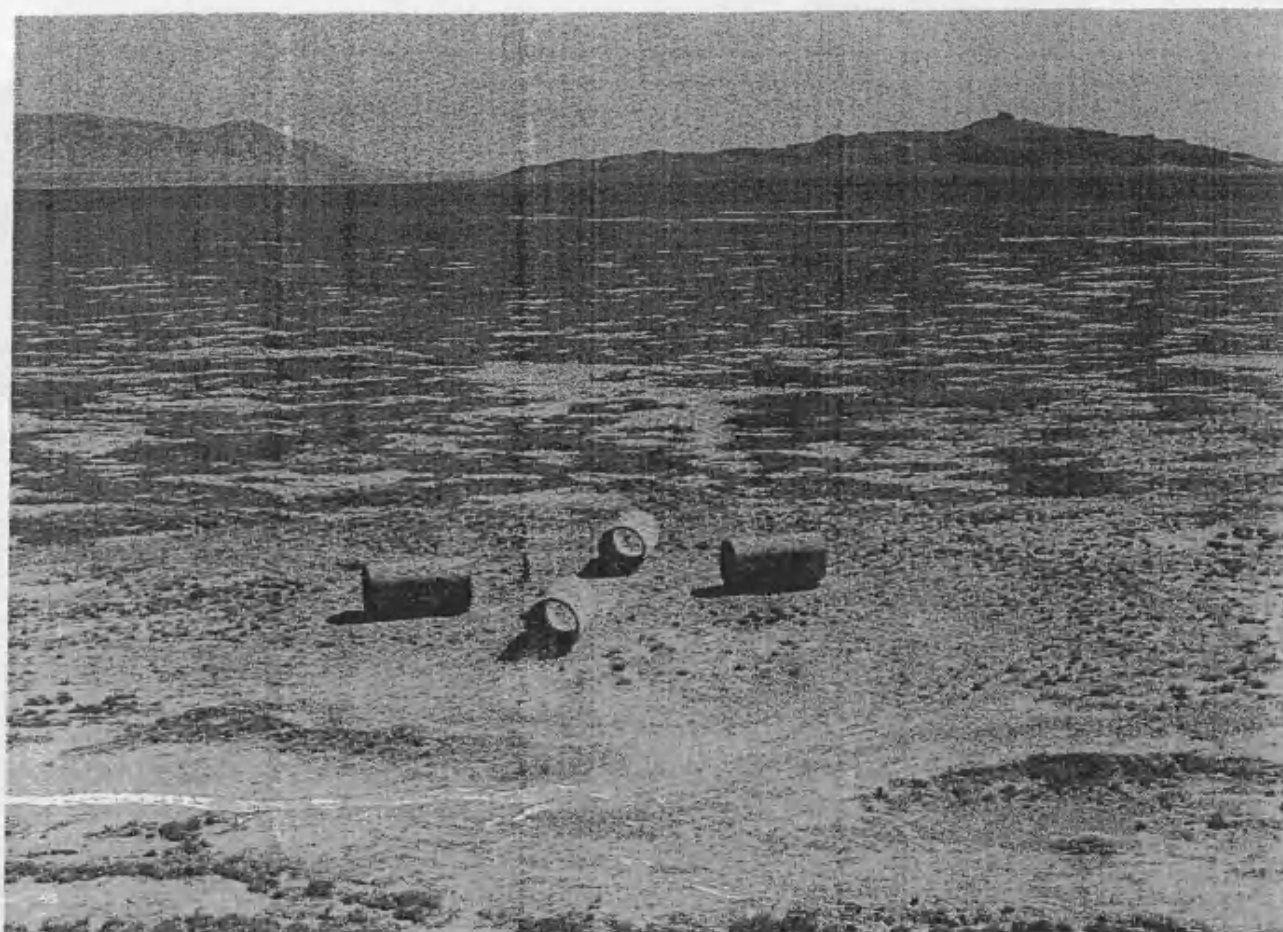
III. 18: Diagram: Musical Soundtrack in Antonioni's films (1950-1964). Source: Giuseppe D'Amato, "Antonioni: la poetica dei materiali," *Bianco e Nero* 62 (January/April 2001), 154-181.



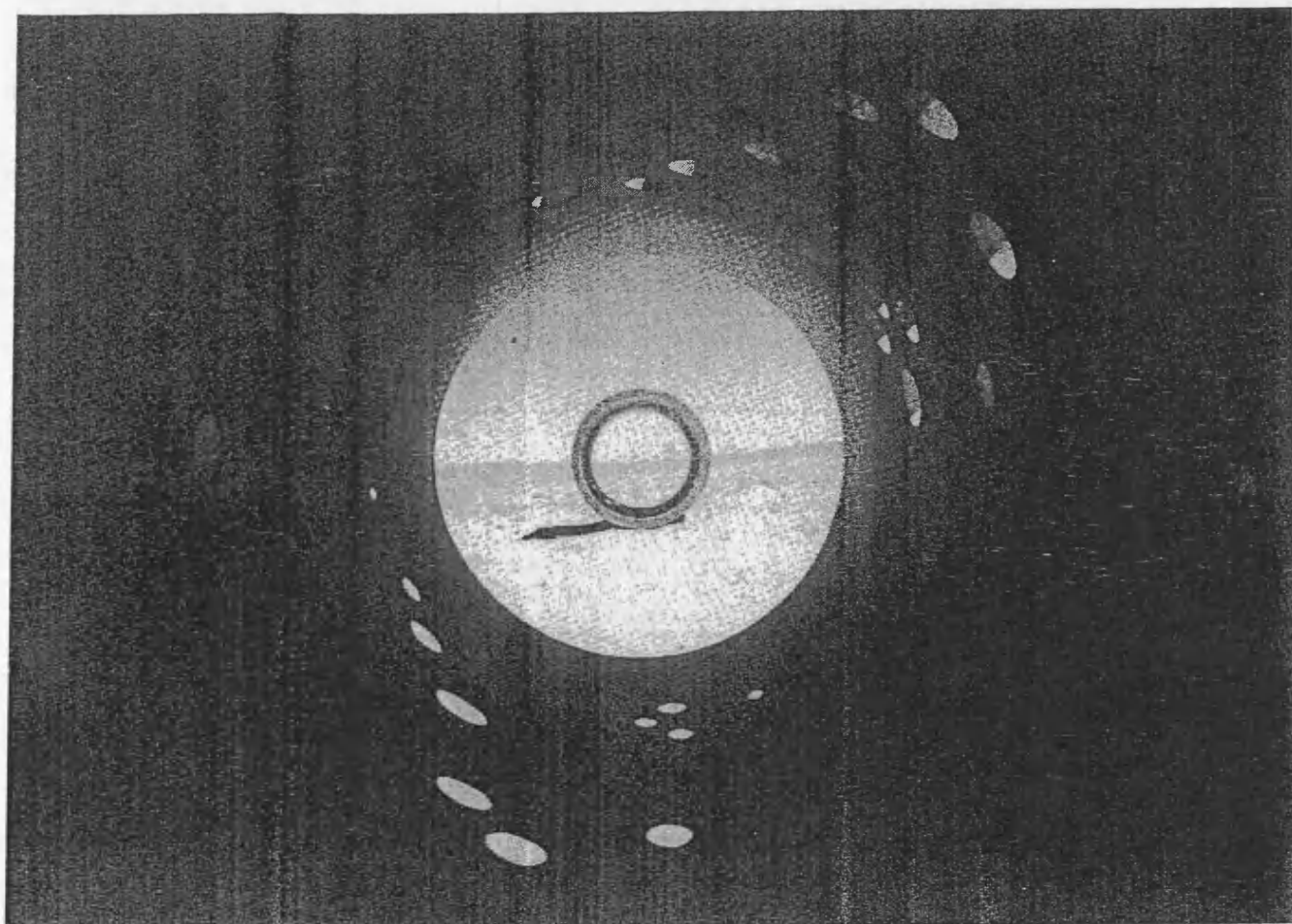
III. 19: John Cage on the Italian TV quiz *Lascia o Raddoppia* ("Double or Nothing"), 1959. Above: with the quiz host, Mike Buongiorno. Below: Première of *Water Walk*, 1959. Source: Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage* (London: Allen Lane, 1971).



III. 20: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970. Coil 1500' long and approx. 15' wide. Black rock, salt crystals, earth, red water (algae). Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni.



III. 21: Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, The Great Basin Desert, Northwestern Utah, 1973-76. Concrete tunnels: length 18'; diameters outside 9' 2 1/2"; diameters inside: 8'. Wall thickness: 7 1/4". Photo: Nancy Holt.



III. 22: Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, The Great Basin Desert, Northwestern Utah, 1973-76, interior detail. Photo: Nancy Holt.